


R WAGNER'S RINGGOLD

as retold by Oliver Huckel



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THE RHINE-GOLD: BY WAGNER
RETOLD BY OLIVER HUCKEL



The Lure of the Rhine-Maidens

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The Rhine-Gold

A · DRAMATIC · POEM · BY · RICHARD
WAGNER · FREELY · TRANSLATED
IN · POETIC · NARRATIVE · FORM · BY

Oliver · Huckel



Thomas · P · Crowell · & · Co ·

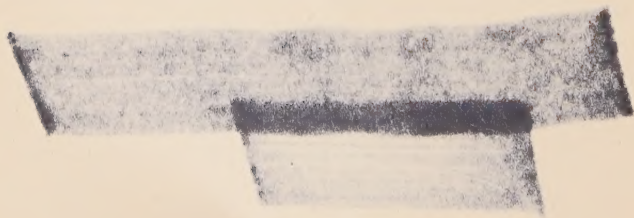
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CONTENTS

FOREWORD	Page ix
PART I	
The Rape of the Gold	3
PART II	
The Pact with the Giants	27
PART III	
Slaves of the Ring	57
PART IV	
The Curse Eternal	77

ILLUSTRATIONS

The Lure of the Rhine-maidens

Frontispiece

The Vision of Valhalla

Facing 28

FOREWORD

THERE is something primitive, colossal, majestic in Wagner's fourfold music drama of *The Nibelungen Ring*. It partakes of the power and grandeur of the earlier ages of the world. It is a drama of the mighty era of the gods, the giants, and the heroes before the coming of man upon the earth. It is the wondrous story in which was enwrapped much of the religious belief of our ancient Northern ancestors in Europe.

The deepest truths of this drama of primitive life are universal, and their meanings as potent to-day as in the prehistoric world. It is a vast allegory of the strongest passions of life. It is a dream of yesterday and a vision of to-morrow, if we have eyes to look into the heart of its mystery.

It is the aim of this present translation and interpretation to present the story of *The Ring* in the clear and strong way of the German original, to show the relation of the parts and the dramatic unity of the whole, to make the whole vast epic stand out in its own vivid light and thrilling power.

The usual English librettos of *The Ring* are totally inadequate and confusing as translations of Wagner's text. They are made to suit the musical requirements rather than to present the thought in literary form. It is often a perplexing task rather than a pleasure to read them. Tenfold more involved and obscure than Browning, they have none of his redeeming grace of thought or speech.

The present translation aims to be faithful to Wagner's text, and at the same time clear in thought, poetic in imagery, rhythmic in expression. It endeavors to transfuse into English the very spirit of Wagner's lofty thought.

It will be remembered that Wagner wrote *The Nibelungen Ring*, first of all, merely as a poem, and so it was originally published. The music was not composed until a later period. Some parts of the published poem he did not use for the music, and they are not given in the librettos,—for instance, Brunnhilda's splendid farewell words in *The Dusk of the Gods*,—but we have used them in this translation as being a real part of the poem, and as a fine inspiration for the interpretation of the fullest thought of the drama.

The Nibelungen Ring, as Wagner gives it, is divided into four dramas,—*The Rhine-Gold*, *The Valkyrie*, *Siegfried*, and *The Dusk of the Gods*. These are a tetralogy, a cycle of four great music dramas, or, as it is sometimes designated, a trilogy, considering *The Rhine-Gold* as a prelude to the greater story of *The Valkyrie*, *Siegfried*, and *The Dusk of the Gods*.

In these introductory words, we may find it helpful toward a clear understanding to consider the four dramas as one great epic whole,—for such they are,—and to study the sources of the story, the story itself, and finally its spiritual and universal significance. In doing this, each one of the dramas will be studied in some detail, the special features noted, the unusual references explained, and the dramatic scope

and purpose considered. Wagner's part in the remarkable welding into unity will then be clearly seen. **Fore-
word**

I

As to the sources, we may remember that *The Ring*, as we have it in Wagner's dramas, is not taken from the ancient *Nibelungen Lied*, to which it bears some resemblance, but it is an independent composition. It was derived by Wagner from various ancient songs and sagas, composed by many old bards, and Wagner wove it into one great harmonious story. Its main features, and also innumerable details, are from the old Norse and German myths, but there has been selection and rearrangement of the material. The principal source of *The Ring* was the *Volsunga Saga*, a Scandinavian epic, preserved in the Icelandic literature. Lesser parts of the story are taken from the *Elder Edda* and the *Younger Edda*, old Norse sagas. Other parts are taken from the *Nibelungen Lied*, the *Eckenlied*, and other Teutonic folklore.

The great drama, as Wagner finally evolved it, is wonderfully true to the ancient spirit, and gives a splendid glimpse into the earlier mythology and legends of the Northern peoples. In the drama of *The Ring* there is portrayed a primitive existence in the world, and at first there are only four distinct races, — the gods, the giants, the dwarfs, the nymphs. Later, by a special creation, there come two other races, — the valkyrie and the heroes. As to the characterization of these races, we may note that

the gods are the noblest and highest race, and dwell first in the mountain meadows, later in the palace of Valhalla on the heights. The giants are a great and strong race, but lack wisdom; they hate what is noble, and are enemies of the gods; they dwell in caves near the earth's surface. The dwarfs, or nibelungs, are black, uncouth pigmies, hating the good, hating the gods; they are crafty and cunning, and dwell in the bowels of the earth. The nymphs are pure, innocent creatures of the water. The valkyrie are daughters of the gods, but mingled with a mortal strain; they gather dead heroes from the battle-fields and carry them to Valhalla. The heroes are children of the gods, but also mingled with a mortal strain; they are destined to become at last the highest race of all, and to succeed the gods in the government of the world.

The principal gods are Wotan, the first of the gods; Loki, the god of fire; Donner, the god of thunder; Froh, the god of joy. The goddesses are Fricka, wife of Wotan and goddess of marriage; Freya, the goddess of love; Erda, the goddess of earth. The chief giants are Fafner and Fasolt, brothers. The chief dwarfs are Alberich and Mime, brothers, and later Hagan, son of Alberich. The chief nymphs are the Rhine-daughters, Flosshilda, Woglinda, and Wellgunda. There are nine Valkyrie, of whom Brunnhilda is the leading one. The most important relationship to remember is that of Brunnhilda and Siegfried. Brunnhilda is the daughter of Wotan and Erda. Siegfried is the son

of Siegmund and Sieglinda, both of whom are children of Wotan by a mortal woman. The drama culminates with the slaying of Siegfried and the sacrificial death of Brunnhilda.

Fore-
word

There are many magical elements in the drama of *The Ring*, such as the ring itself, which endows its owner with supernatural power and ensures the obedience of others to his commands; the tarnhelm, or wishing-cap, which enables its owner to become invisible, or to assume any form he pleases; the sword, which has magic power, given by Wotan; the golden apples that grow in the garden of the goddess Freya, and impart eternal youth to all who eat them; the draught of oblivion, which effaces memory; the draught of memory, which restores it; the bird which speaks to Siegfried and leads him; the dragon into which Fafner transforms himself; the dragon's blood, which enables Siegfried to understand the language of birds; the fire which springs up around the sleeping Brunnhilda at the command of the fire-god Loki. It is well to have these relations and symbols clearly in mind in reading the successive parts of the drama. It will be a blazed path through the mazes and intricacies of the forest.

II

Those who wish to study the differences in the legends of the *Nibelungen Lied* and the *Nibelungen Ring*, and the way in which Wagner used his ancient material, are referred to Professor W. C. Sawyer's book on *Teutonic Legends*

in the Nibelungen Lied and the Nibelungen Ring, where the matter is treated in full detail. For a very thorough and clear analysis of The Ring as Wagner gives it, with a study of the musical motifs, probably nothing is better for general readers than the volume *The Epic of Sounds*, by Freda Winworth. The more scholarly work of Professor Lavignac is indispensable for the student of Wagner's dramas. There is much illuminating comment on the sources and materials in *Legends of the Wagner Drama* by J. L. Weston. One of the best literary appreciations of the ancient legends is the essay by Thomas Carlyle, under the title of *The Nibelungen Ring*. That stern old prophet and wonderful prose-poet was a lover of German literature and especially of this great drama of The Ring. As to the argument of the story, it will also be best to get that clearly in mind as a whole before going into the details of the various parts. It will save much confusion.

In brief the whole story of The Ring is this: The Rhine-Gold tells how a hoard of gold exists in the depths of the Rhine, guarded by the innocent Rhine-maidens. Alberich, a dwarf, forswears love to gain this gold. He makes it into a magic ring. It gives him all power. He gathers by it a hoard of treasures. Meanwhile Wotan, chief of the gods, has engaged the giants to build for him a noble castle, Valhalla, from whence to rule the world. They build it and come for payment. He had promised to give to them Freya, goddess of youth and love. But now the gods find they cannot spare Freya, up-

on whom they depend for their immortal youth. Loki, the god of fire and god of cunning craft as well, must provide some substitute. He tells of Alberich's magic ring and other treasure. The giants agree to take this. Wotan goes with Loki, and they steal it from Alberich, who curses them and lays the curse upon all who shall henceforth possess it. On compulsion they give the magic ring and the treasures to the giants as a substitute for Freya. The curse begins. Fafner kills his brother to get all, and transforms himself into a dragon to guard the treasures and the ring. The gods enter Valhalla over the rainbow bridge.

The second part of the drama, called The Valkyrie, relates how Wotan still covets the ring. He cannot take it himself, for he has given his word to the giants. He stands or falls by his word. So he devises an artifice to get the ring. He will get a hero-race to work for him and recover the ring and the treasures. Siegmund and Sieglinda are twin children of this new race. Sieglinda is carried off as a child and is forced into marriage with Hunding. Siegmund comes, and unknowingly breaks the law of marriage, but wins Nothung, the great sword, and a bride. Brunnhilda, chief of the Valkyrie, is commissioned by Wotan at the instance of Fricka, goddess of marriage, to slay him for his sin. She disobeys and tries to save him, but Hunding, helped by Wotan, slays him. Sieglinda, however, about to bear the free hero, to be called Siegfried, is saved by Brunnhilda, and hid in the forest. Brunnhilda herself is punished by

being made a mortal woman. She is left sleeping on the mountains with a wall of fire around her which only a hero can penetrate.

The drama continues. The story of Siegfried opens with a scene in the smithy between Mime the dwarf and Siegfried. Mime is welding a sword, and Siegfried scorns him. Mime tells him something of his mother, Sieglinda, and shows him the broken pieces of his father's sword. Wotan comes and tells Mime that only one who has no fear can remake the sword. Now Siegfried knows no fear and soon remakes the sword Nothung. Wotan and Alberich come to where the dragon Fafner is guarding the ring. They both long for it, but neither can take it. Soon Mime comes bringing Siegfried with the mighty sword. Fafner comes out, but Siegfried slays him. Happening to touch his lips with the dragon's blood, he understands the language of the birds. They tell him of the ring. He goes and gets it. Siegfried now has possession of the ring, but it is to bring him nothing of happiness, only evil. It is to curse love and finally bring death. The birds also tell him of Mime's treachery. He slays Mime. He longs for some one to love. The birds tell him of the slumbering Brunnhilda. A little bird leads him on the way. Wotan, who has taken last counsel of Erda, opposes him and tests him, but sees that he is the true hero at last. Siegfried finds Brunnhilda, loves her, awakens her; she in bewilderment and joy gives herself to him, and the supreme lovers of the world find love's victory and love's ecstasy.

The Dusk of the Gods portrays at the opening the three norns or fates weaving and measuring the thread of destiny. It is the beginning of the end. The perfect pair, Siegfried and Brunnhilda, appear in all the glory of their life, splendid ideals of manhood and womanhood. But Siegfried goes out into the world to achieve deeds of prowess. He gives her the Nibelungen ring to keep as a pledge of his love till his return. Meanwhile Alberich also has begotten a son, Hagan, to achieve for him the possession of the ring. He is partly of the Gibichung race, and works through Gunther and Gutrune, half-brother and half-sister to him. They beguile Siegfried to them, give him a magic draught, which makes him forget Brunnhilda and fall in love with Gutrune. Under this same spell, he offers to bring Brunnhilda for wife to Gunther. Now is Valhalla full of sorrow and despair. The gods fear the end. Wotan murmurs, "O that she would give back the ring to the Rhine." But Brunnhilda will not give it up,—it is now her pledge of love. Siegfried comes, takes the ring, and Brunnhilda is now brought to the Rhine castle of the Gibichungs, but Siegfried under the spell does not love her. She is to be wedded to Gunther. She rises in wrath and denounces Siegfried. But at a hunting banquet Siegfried is given another magic draught, remembers all, and is slain by Hagan by a blow in the back, as he calls on Brunnhilda's name in love. Then comes the end. The body of Siegfried is burned on a funeral pyre, a grand funeral march is heard, and Brunnhilda rides into the flames

and sacrifices herself for love's sake; the ring goes back to the Rhine-daughters; and the old world — of the gods and Valhalla, of passion and sin — is burnt up with flames, for the gods have broken moral law, and coveted power rather than love, gold rather than truth, and therefore must perish. They pass, and a new era, the reign of love and truth, has begun.

III

And now looking at the real significance of the drama, we may take *The Nibelungen Ring* in one of three ways. We may consider it merely as a retelling in splendid form of some of the greatest of the ancient legends of the Norse mythology. It then becomes a national epic of the Northern peoples, as the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were the great epics of the Southern peoples. It is a great story, such as the childhood of the race loves. It is a mighty picture, or series of pictures, full of beauty, passion, pathos, tragedy, majesty. It has no hidden meanings. It is just a world-old legend that grew up in the poetic imagination of the people, or a legend cyclus that developed around some ancient historic events.

Or we may take it as an ancient story rearranged by Richard Wagner to teach social and political lessons. In this view it is a great allegory of the political life of Europe in Wagner's day. It is a socialistic pamphlet, written in splendid poetic imagery. Such is Mr. Bernard Shaw's interpretation, in his book called *The*

Perfect Wagnerite. We may remember in this connection that Wagner was political revolutionist and socialistic philosopher as well as poet and musician.

This view that *The Ring* is a drama of modern labor gives it an intensely vivid and contemporaneous interest. Against the background of the gods the mighty play is worked out,—the tyranny of capital, the swarming masses of the working people, and the great ethical principles involved in the struggle are wonderfully shown. Here are some of the keynotes of the drama in lines here and there. See how modern they sound! “When you pant for power, little can your hard hearts know of holiness;” that is, love of money often smothers the soul. “To get power ye will trample in lawless contempt love and a woman’s worth;” that is, all ideals, all love, is forsworn for gold. Again, “When to a ring this gold is fashioned, it grasps and holds the world;” that is, the ring is organized wealth, great corporations. “This tarnhelm makes invisible;” a board of directors is impersonal, irresponsible, invisible,—the corporation is soulless. “Unto him ye are slaves, ye must cringe and serve;” so gold speaks to the swarms of workers. “Lazy hounds, heap up my wealth, dig out my metal, melt it into bars!” so speaks a modern master of the mines, steel, copper, or coal. “Tremble in terror, O slaves, heed his rule who holds the ring!” that is, gold is king. But there is also another side shown here: “Beware of the host when the Nibelungs shall upheave from night to day;” that is, when the

labor-world awakes and asserts itself. All this makes a tremendously strong parable. Lust of gold is shown as responsible for the loss of spiritual nature, ideals, love. It has brought cruelty, oppression, lying, robbery, murder. But it also brings the social upheaval which finally awakens the true ideals and ushers in the better day.

Or, finally, we may take the drama as veiling great spiritual and eternal truths, not put there by Wagner, but inherent in the great story itself and forever working themselves out into revelations in all the great legends and in all the great events of the world. In this last view there comes out the truth of the curse of the lust of power; the truth of the real supremacy of love; the truth of the inevitableness and eternity of the reign of moral law in the world.

Looking at the universal and eternal truths, therefore, the main idea of the whole Ring drama may be given in this one phrase: "To show the contrast of the two powers that rule the world,—the power of love and the power of gold." The chief thought in *The Rhine-Gold* is: "Base love of gold destroys golden love, and prophesies ruin and the curse." In *The Valkyrie*: "The reign of law, and the inevitableness of fate." In *Siegfried*: "Courage, born of innocence, outvies all cunning, and, inspired by love, conquers all things." In *The Dusk of the Gods*: "Ambition betrays itself, but love, through self-sacrifice, is supreme, and redeems the curse." Or we may see a little more fully in some such way as this: *The Rhine-Gold* is a parable of the

curse of gold. Innocent enough is gold itself; it becomes a power and can become a curse when its inordinate love takes possession of the soul. Its love forsworn is sufficient to gain gold, but what is it all worth?

The Valkyrie is a parable of the punishment of violated laws. There is a reign of law in the world. Whoso offends must suffer. It is inevitable. Heaven itself is subject to its divine laws. Siegfried is a type of perfect innocence and goodness. This hero seems an embodiment of "summer and springtide, youth and strength, beauty and love." He is the highest ideal of a free hero, caring nothing for gold, possessing all things good in himself. Such a hero of light is at once attacked by envy and hate. So he falls a victim of the dark wiles, the embodiment of envy, hatred, and greed in the child of evil.

The Dusk of the Gods is a parable of the passing away of the ancient mythologies. As light came, as the ages went on, men saw that the old legends of the gods and goddesses, who played fast and loose with law, who broke covenants, could not remain. Moral law must be supreme. Love in self-sacrifice is the great revelation. Unworthy gods, annihilated by the principle of evil which they have introduced, — this is the meaning of the allegory where the gods are devoured by the fiery flames. Myth passed to make way for truth. The gods passed away to give place to God.

There are some perplexing ethical problems involved in the drama. The infidelity of Wotan, both to love and truth, are sad pictures of the

highest of the gods. The traditions, however, of Greek and Roman mythology are similar. The relations of Siegmund and Sieglinda have classic precedent among the gods, but are antagonistic to all our human instincts. The drama shows how love is superior to all law, and yet how the violation of law is inevitably punished. The greatest teaching of the drama is that love is supreme, but that the highest love is in full harmony with the highest law. In Browning's phrase, "All's love, yet all's law."

Richard Wagner's genius in all this great work is manifest. Ordinarily the Northern mythology has a curious interest for merely a few students and scholars. But the genius of Wagner, both in poetry and music, has brought this remote and mythical world to the living interest and ken of tens of thousands in all parts of the civilized world. German literature and the whole race owe much to him for this literary revival. But another debt we also owe to him. These old legends that grew up in most primitive ages from time to time found rude redactors, or editors, who endeavored to string the various legends together in continuous and harmonious narrative. Such was the ancient bard of the *Nibelungen Lied*. So in our own day Richard Wagner has performed a similar service, but in larger way and with more wonderful genius than any who has ever touched the legends. He found their unity and eternal significance and rearranged them to tell their greatest story for all time. Essentially this great fourfold drama is the drama of a primitive and pagan

era. It is an era long before Christianity, with no mention whatever of Greek, Roman, Jewish, or Christian gods or symbols. It is the atmosphere of ancient heathendom in the wilderness of most ancient Germany and Scandinavia. Nevertheless Richard Wagner makes the ancient story a modern revelation. This is a notable achievement. The great teaching of the supremacy of love,—was this in the ancient myths or thought of the primitive people? We cannot find it on the surface of the ancient legends. And yet Wagner has not read it into them, but rather unveiled it from them. He has so arranged his ancient material as to teach this universal and eternal truth, which only later and maturer understanding has made clear as being forever in the warp and woof of all human history and literature. As Wagner gives it, this drama is a great moral study, full of seriousness, conscience, and unending consequence. In this way the genius of Richard Wagner has given new vitality and significance to ancient myth and legend. He becomes an interpreter of humanity and a teacher of the greatest truths of life.

OLIVER HUCKEL

May Day, 1907

THE RHINE-GOLD. PART I

THE RAPE OF THE GOLD



Y E who would listen to an ancient tale
Of days when this old world of ours
was young;

Of gods and giants, water-maidens,
dwarfs;
Of magic rings and swords and treasure
hoards,—

Draw near in reverence, for the tale is true
Of time primeval and of latest days,—
A parable of the strange curse of gold.

Ye shall see Wotan, chief of all the gods;
And his spouse Fricka, guardian of law;
Loki, the god of fire and cunning craft;
And Freya, goddess of immortal youth;
Donner, the god of thunder; Froh, of joy;
The giants, Fafner and the fierce Fasolt;
The gruesome Nibelungs and all their hates;
The fair Rhine-daughters guarding the Rhine-
gold;

And Erda, all-wise goddess of the earth,
Primeval wisdom, mother of all life;
And Erda's three fair daughters, called the
Norns,
Who spoke the oracles and ruled the fates.

All this was in the far-dim days of eld
Before the coming of the race of man.
Only three races dwelt upon the earth,—
The gods, the giants, and the elfish gnomes.
The gnomes, called Nibelungs, were grovelling
herds

Who swarmed beneath the blackness of the
earth,
While other happier gnomes, the water-elfs,
Dwelt in the fountains, sea, or river-beds;
The giants had great caves in forest depths;
The gods were happy in the meadow lands
Of some green valley redolent of flowers,
But at the last they dwelt upon the heights
In fair Valhalla, glorious in light.
Thus was earth peopled in the elder days
Before the race of heroes came to be,
Or ever many gods gave way to God.

But now the tale begins, — a tale of gold,
Of love and hate, of lust and greed, and death.
List! from afar the booming of the Rhine,
The rushing cataracts among the rocks,
The plashing in the sedges of the banks.
See! nearer yet we come with eager hearts,
And deeper now the booming of the floods,
The mighty flow of the great golden Rhine.
See! we are hid within the mystic depths,
And hear the throb of its swift-moving life,
The pulse and power of all its rhythmic flow.
And see! the twilight glimmer of the tides,
The ever-restless currents of the stream,
The waves of emerald light, the airy flight
Of bubbles, while around the jagged rocks,
That jut in wild confusion from the depths
Where deeper, darker fissures ever yawn,
The waters flow in softly curling mist,
Fair clouds that float within the mystic shades
With shimmerings of twilight golden-green.
But see! around the jutting rocky crag

Whose high peak rises toward the shining
light
Are swimming swiftly in all grace and glee
Three beauteous maidens, wondrous water-
nymphs, —
Fair daughters of the waters of the Rhine!
Joyous and guileless as the crystal flood,
They swim and sport in innocent delight.
The livelong day these sisters of the stream
Sing, joyous-hearted, sweet, alluring songs;
Their waving tresses floating in the flood,
Crowned with bright ornaments of pearl and
shell;
Their mermaid forms resplendent with the
waves
Serene and cool as is the water's depths;
Trailing some dainty veil of river weeds
And sparkling as with dewdrops or with jewels.
Now with the rhythm of the water's flow
And to the dancing of the glimmering light,
Woglinda sang a dainty snatch of song:

“**H** EIGH-HO! hither, ye waters!
Waver and waft me to sleep
on your breast!
Heigh-ho! hither, ye waters!
Weave me sweet dreams on your
billowy crest!”

While far above, Wellgunda's sweet voice cried:
“Dear sister, fair Woglinda, where art thou,
Singing so sweetly to the wandering waves?
And dost thou watch our treasure all alone?”
Quickly she answered: “Yea, alone and sad,

The
Rape
of the
Gold

Till fair Wellgunda glideth to my side."
Then swift as arrow in its silvery flight
Wellgunda dove down through the glittering
depths,
Sporting around Woglinda, and in glee
Sought fast to clasp her in encircling arms
With words half mocking: "Ah, dear sister
mine,
How farest thou in sad and lonely watch?"
But quick as flash, Woglinda had escaped
And tossed an answer from a distant rock:
"Yea, sister, lone and too far for thy reach!"
Then they began a game of hide-and-seek,
Swimming and diving, floating, flashing fast,
Tossing and tumbling in the laughing waves,
Until another voice from far above,
The golden-haired Flosshilda, called to them:
"Heigh-ho! my sisters, rollicking and gay!"
But scarcely heeding, fair Wellgunda cried:
"Yea, dear Flosshilda, come and swim with me!
Swift as a flash Woglinda flies from me!
Come, help me catch this fleeing fairy form!"

Another quivering stir within the depths,
Another dive, and merry pealing laugh,
And fair Flosshilda is between the two;
She gazed upon them with a look severe,
And half in earnest, half in banter, cried:
"Fine guardians ye of all this sleeping gold,
Laughing and sporting whereso'er ye list!
Better watch well this gleaming treasure's bed,
Or ye will live to weep where now ye smile!"
At that, she mocking threatened them with
blows,

Chased them, like lightning gleaming through
the deep,
Pursued with screams of laughter and delight,
And they in mock affright from rock to rock
Darted and dove in shouts of wildest joy.

The
Rape
of the
Gold

Sudden from some dark chasm in the rocks,
Stealing along the slippery river-bed,
Came Alberich the dwarf, a sodden brute,
Begotten of the Nibelungen race,
That dwell in black night underneath the earth;
This Alberich was cunningest of all
And ugliest of the dark and ugly hordes;
Swart was his skin, and green his bulging eyes;
Great head misshapen, and short crooked legs,
And sprawling feet like crows' feet; hair and
beard

Grizzled and matted, bristly and unclean;
Dark, treacherous, and cunning his whole mien,
An ugly creature of the loathsome night,
And as he walked, it seemed as if he crawled.
Awkward he clambered up a rugged rock,
Sat in the shadow, huddled in a heap;
And with amaze, he watched the water-
nymphs,

A wondrous vision to his eager eyes,
A vision of fair beauty and glad hearts.
All that his own life lacked he saw in them,—
Love, music, fairness, joy, and sweetest bliss;
Filled was his heart with hope and deep de-
sire,
Although to them his mean life offered
naught—

Poor wretched fool, to gloat his eyes on them!

The
Rape
of the
Gold

Yet cried he with his harsh and strident voice:
"Ho! ho! ye nixies, nimble water-folk!
I am from Nibelheim in earth's dark depths!
Glad I behold you! Pray, come nearer me!"

Startled by this strange voice, the sisters quick
Ceased their gay sport, and peered out through
the depths,
To find the rough intruder hidden close.
Woglinda cried: "Ho! who or what is there?"
Wellgunda spake: "That voice is shivering
curse."
Flosshilda whispered: "See, what scowls be-
low!"

Deeper they dove, and in the gloomy depths
They saw the ugly Nibelungen shape.
"Avaunt! thou filthy beast!" they cried in rage,
And swiftly diving upward out of reach.
Then spake Flosshilda: "Sisters, guard the
gold!
Our father warned us of a foe like this!"
Quickly they gathered round the central rock
To guard the storied treasure of the Rhine.

Then called the dwarf again: "List! there aloft!"
With scorn they answered: "Faugh! What
wouldst thou, beast?"
He lifted up his huddled mass of flesh
With hard attempt to straighten his misshape;
He put a piteous pleading in his tones,
And spake: "And do I spoil your merry sport,
If I admiring stand and gaze at you?
Dive nearer, pray! This Nibelung doth long

To play with you and dally with your charms."
Woglinda shrieked: "The dwarf would play
with us!"

Wellgunda cried: "The dwarf would mock at
us!"

But laughed Flosshilda: "O what sport is here!"

Yet eagerly and smoothly now he spoke:

"How beautiful you shine in this fair light,
How soft and sweet in these dim shimmering
waves!

Would I could hold such beauty in embrace!

Descend, I pray, to these my loving arms!"

They laughed at him, and fair Flosshilda spake:

"Yea, we can laugh at fear. The foe's in love!

He cannot harm our gold: Love blinds his eyes!"

Thereat Wellgunda shrieked and laughed
again:

"O see him now, the lustful little beast!

O piteous fool! O love-sick, love-lorn calf!"

While fair Woglinda whispered: "Sisters,
come!

Make fair pretence to love, and see what sport!"

With that, she swam out from her lofty perch,

Glided in graceful curves around the rocks,

Floated awhile as if in slumber's dreams,

Sudden awoke in merry peals of song,

And soon was near the dark misshapen dwarf,

Who gazed with eager eyes and open mouth,

And panted: "Here she is! so close to me!"

Upon a rocky ledge she sat and called:

"Come up to me, my dear! Come, clamber up!"

The
Rape
of the
Gold

Quick he obeyed. With uncouth awkward
strides,
Panting and puffing, spluttering with spume,
He climbed and clambered up the rugged rock,
With mutterings: "This cursèd slimy rock
Is full of slips and slides. What hands or feet
Can find a grip on this uncertain crag.
And O! this nasty slime fills all my nose!
Accursèd sneezing! it will break my hold!"

Whereat Woglinda to her sisters laughed:
"Behold how grandly doth my suitor sneeze!"

But wildly sought the dwarf to clutch her waist,
With eager cry: "Be mine, O maiden fair!
My sweet, my beautiful, I clasp thee now!"

She glided from him with a whispered word:
"Wouldst woo me? Come a little higher then!"
And on a loftier rock, she climbed and smiled,
While both the other nymphs in laughter roared.

A moment sat the dwarf in blank amaze;
Then scratched his head in crazy thought and
cried:
"Woe's me! Thou hast escaped my loving
hands;
But come again, and lower reach to me!
'Tis heavy task for me to climb the rocks,
While you can swim and glide with grace and
ease!"

So seeming pitiful, Woglinda swam,
And sank down to a rock far in the depths,

And cried: "Come, dear! Come in the depths to me!

Here I am waiting for thy fond embrace!"

With haste he scrambled down the slippery rock,

And sought her, muttering: "Best here below!"

But she, sly jade! eluding him again,
Leaped through the waters to a loftier peak,
And cried: "Behold me, dear! just over thee!"
While all the maidens laughed in merriest glee.

He laughed a little, but in hidden rage,
And muttered to himself: "Ah, coy young fish,
How shall I hook thee? Wait a bit and see!
Yea, gay deceiver, I shall have thee yet!"

Again he started up the slippery rocks,
When from below he heard another voice, —
Wellgunda's voice in fair pretence of love:
"Oho, my hero! Listen now to me!"

And turning around he asked: "Who calls to me?"

And fair Wellgunda smiling answered soft:
"Come here to me! I counsel thee full well!
Mind not Woglinda! She is fooling thee!"

He looked upon her long and eagerly,
And coming toward her, clambering o'er the rocks,

The
Rape
of the
Gold

He murmured, admiration in his words:
"Why, fairer far art thou than she I lost!
She was too smooth and sleek and sly for me;
Thou art more sparkling, graceful, and superb.
Only dive deeper, and come nearer me!"

Whereat the fair Wellgunda nearer swam,
And whispered: "See how very close I am!"

But still he cried: "Not near enough! Come
nigh!

Entwine me with thy tender loving arms,
And I will hold thee to my beating heart
In passionate delight and bliss of love."
But fair Wellgunda gently stood aloof,
Yet asked him with a feign of loving tones:
"Now tell me, art thou truly deep in love
And longing for the favors of the fair?
Come, my dear wooer, let me see thy face!
Here, turn it to the light! Stand out, I say!
Faugh! what a hairy, horrible old imp!
Swarthy and stunted, shrivelled-up old brute,
Seek for thy lover some beast like thyself!"

In awful rage, he clutched for her and cried:
"I may not be so fair, but I am strong,
And I will fetter thee, false queen, at last!"
But she was gone, quick darting up the rock,
Retorting: "Fetter fast, if thou canst catch!"
And all the sisters shrieked aloud with glee.

But low he muttered in a sputtering rage:
"Yea, false and fickle! Chilly, slippery fish!

Am I not shapely, fair, and glib, and gay?
If I am loathsome, love your slimy eels!"

The
Rape
of the
Gold

Then fair Flosshilda glided forth and spake:
"What art thou scolding at so furious fast?
Already so discouraged at thy fate?
Two only thou hast sought and found them
false.
Seek now the third,—thy luck may run in
thirds—
A sweet reward may wait thee in the third!"

And Alberich, once more delighted, cried!
"Thou singest sweetest music unto me!
What joy that every taste is not alike!
I knew that some discerning one at last
Would choose me, even though the others
scorned;
I knew that some one I would surely please,
Although the many are but slow to choose!
Yet, sweet one, give me fullest faith in thee!
Descend, and let me hold thee in these arms!"

Then fair Flosshilda, daring in her sport,
Swam to his very side and cried aloud:
"How dull and foolish are you, sisters mine,
To find no beauty in this suitor here!"

While drawing near with eager, amorous eyes,
The dwarf rejoined: "Yea, dull and hateful both
They seem to me since I behold thy face,
My fair, my sweetest, yea, my loveliest love."

Cajolingly Flosshilda whispered low:

"O warble still thy sweet and wondrous song!
What harmony it soundeth in mine ears!"

Nearer he came, and touched her with caress,
Started with joy, and whispered in her ear:
"I tremble all aglow, my heart's aflame, —
Such gracious praises fill me with delight!"

Flosshilda held him off, and looked at him
With seeming loving eyes, and gently spoke:
"Thy pleasant countenance makes glad my
eyes,
My courage is refreshed by thy smile!"
With that she drew him tenderly and close,
And whispered soft, "Thou blessedest of men!"

And he all overjoyed: "Thou sweetest maid!"

Then she: "O wouldest thou wert ever mine!"

And he: "Yea, if forever I could hold thee
thus!"

Still mocking him in love pretence, she cried:
"Dear brow, so low and staring-eyed and swart;
Dear beard, so straggle-haired and bristly
brown,
How blest am I to touch and handle them;
And this gray hair in rough and stubbly mass,
And these dear, darling elf-locks, streaming
long, —
Would they might flow round poor Flosshilda's
heart!
Thy dainty form, that squatteth like a toad,

Thy sweet voice, strident as a screech-owl's
note!

O, how I worship, all amazed and still,
Just seeing thee and hearing thy sweet words!"

The
Rape
of the
Gold

A peal of laughter interrupted her,
For fair Woglinda and Wellgunda came,
Swimming around them in a boisterous glee.

Then Alberich in sudden anger cried:
"You saucy wenches, do ye laugh at me?"

And fair Flosshilda, darting from him, laughed:
"Yea, ugly fool, we scoff thee to thy face,—
Thus merrily thy happy love-song ends!"

Beside himself with wrath, fierce Alberich
screamed:

"Woe's me! Woe's me! O bitterness and pain!
I am betrayed! I am betrayed and scorned!
O shameless wantons, crafty, cold, and cruel!
False, lying hussies, treacherous and bold!"

But louder yet they laughed, and scoffed at him:
"Heigh-ho, thou gruesome, loathsome Nibe-
lung!

Yea, gnash thy ugly teeth and bite the slime!
But listen! Here's a secret for thine ear!
Wouldst know why thou hast lost thy lady love?
Thou didst not hold us fast! For true our troth
To him who bravely holds us fast and tight!
Come, seize us fast, and we are true to thee!
Come, seize on us, and stop thy fierce complaint!
See, we swim slow that thou mayst seize on us!"

The
Rape
of the
Gold

Hither and thither, high and low, they swam,—
At times they almost touched him with their
hands.

Sudden he started and chased after them,
And muttered low: "How quick the glowing
flame
Streams through my body, quickening each
limb!

A mighty passion throbs within my blood,
And wrath rekindles all my fading zeal!
Yea, ye may laugh and lie, ye wanton maids!
But I am hot upon your shimmering track,
And one of you I mean to clutch and hold!"

From rock to rock, he clambered after them,
In desperate wrath; he sprang from side to
side

To clutch first one and then the other nymph;
But always they were gone, and laughing gay;
He staggered, fell, but clambered up again;
From rock to rock, he chased them hot in wrath,
Until at last his patience gone he stopped,
Foaming with rage, and breathless; impotent
He shook his clenched fist in their face and cried:
"Woe be to you, if I should catch you now!"

Baffled and mad with rage and fierce desire,
Wrathful he stood and upward scowled at
them,
Gnashing his teeth and squinting his bleared eyes.
When sudden he upstarted,—then stood still—
His eyes grew big with wondering delight!
Something he saw that held his eyes in thrall,

Something that he had never seen before,
Something that drew him with its subtle spell.
For now the sunlight poured a radiant flood
Into the Rhine's dark depths like magic light;
The greens were checkered with the yellow
 sheen,
And some new glory caught his eye's keen
 quest.

There on the summit of the central rock,
He saw a shimmering glow and mystic light;
He saw the waters radiant and red,
And brilliant in the central glow there shone,
Illumining the mighty river's flow,
A blinding glory wondrous to behold,—
A magic mass of lustrous ruddy gold!

And fair Woglinda cried: "Look, sisters, look!
The sunlight flashes on our treasure-store,
And in his glory our fair sleeper wakes!"

Wellgunda cried: "Yea, through the dark
 depths comes
The sunlight, wooing our dear gold to life!"

Flosshilda cried: "See, now the sunlight comes
Kissing the eyelids of the precious one!
Behold, he opens them, and smiles in light!
The waters glow like galaxies of stars!"

And joyously they swam around the gold,—
These fair, sweet sisters of the shimmering
 stream,
Gazing and singing with supreme delight:

The
Rape
of the
Gold

"HAIL to thee! Hail to thee,
Treasure most bright!
Rhine-gold! Rhine-gold!
Lustrous delight!

How gayly thou laughest in radiance rare,
Thy glistening gleams o'er the waters so fair!
Rhine-gold! Rhine-gold!
Glorious sight!

"Hail to thee! Hail to thee!
Out of the night!
Rhine-gold! Rhine-gold!
Wakened so bright!

How happy we dance in thy light-giving flow!
How sweetly we bathe in thy radiant glow!
Rhine-gold! Rhine-gold!
Lustrous delight!"

Still gazing on the gold with awe-struck eyes,
At last the dwarf awakened from the spell,
And cried: "What is it there? O tell me, pray!
What is it there that gleams and glows so fair?"

And in their careless pride, they answered him:
"Where hast thou been these years, thou rustic clod,
That of the Rhine-gold thou hast never learned?
Hast thou not heard about the gold's bright eyes
That sometimes shut in sleep, then glorious wake?
Hast thou not heard of that most wondrous star
Whose light illumines the river's darkest depths?
Behold us glide within its magic glow!

Come on, thou clown! Come, bathe in radiance
here!

Come, swim and sport beside us in the flood!"

They laughed aloud, and sported in their glee;
But Alberich asked: "I pray you, tell me this,—
This gold ye dive around, so glad and gay?
Is it a plaything only, for your sport?
'Tis little, nothing, if 't is only that!"

In careless pride again they answered him,
And fair Woglinda spake: "This jewel of gold
Is greater than all other of earth's gifts
For him who knows the marvel of its power!"

Wellgunda added: "His the whole world's
wealth
Who from the Rhine-gold shapes the mystic
ring,—
The ring of measureless and magic might!"

Quickly Flosshilda spoke: "Nay, sisters, hush!
Our fathers told us oft, and warned us well
To guard the precious gold, nor speak of it,
Lest some false foeman, entering through the
flood,
Should learn its worth and seize it for his own!
So cease your talk, you careless, chattering
crew!"

But fair Wellgunda answered the reproof:
"Dear prudent sister, is rebuke quite just?
You surely know the kind to whom alone
Comes power to make this gold into the ring."

The
Rape
of the
Gold

And fair Woglinda added: "Only he
Who knows not love, who all love hath for-
sworn,
Who lives no more for fond delight of love,—
'Tis he alone the magic skill commands
To mould this glittering gold to matchless
ring!"

Wellgunda hastened with another word:
"Thus, prudent sister, we are surely safe!
For none that lives is wholly without love,—
No heart is free from passion and desire."

And pointing to the dwarf, Woglinda cried:
"And least of all that amorous old imp,—
He rages with a lecherous passion curst."

Laughing, Flosshilda looked at him and said:
"'Tis true enough. It is not him I fear,—
He has not lost the passion from his blood,
For in his bestial warmth well-nigh I scorched."

Laughing, Wellgunda added in her scorn:
"That little wretch! He is a brimstone brand,—
And here plunged into water cool and pure,
His hot lust steams and hisses in its wrath!"

Diving and gliding, merry in their glee,
They swam around him, mocking him with
song:

"**H**eigh-ho! and heigh-ho!
Dear little imp of woe!
Laugh with us, laugh with us!
Heigh-ho and heigh-ho!

Here in the golden glow
Right lordly do you show!
Laugh with us, laugh with us!
Heigh-ho and heigh-ho!"

The
Rape
of the
Gold

But Alberich laughed not, nor looked at them,
His eyes close riveted upon the gold;
He pondered every word that they had said,
But lifted not his gaze, nor changed his stand.
Some say that he had heard of this rare gold
Long, long ago through wandering gossiptales,
And came perforce, with evil in his heart,
To rape the gold and bend it to his use,
For he was cunningest of Nibelungs.
Some say he never knew a pang of love,
But loveless simulated all its wiles
To lure the sisters to his baser craft
And sought out thus the treasure of the gold
Hidden within their keeping in the depths.
Some say that when he saw the maidens fair
He full forgot the object of his quest,
And burned with lust until they baffled him. —
Whatever the dim instincts of his brain,
Now was his quest fulfilled, — the lore revealed.

Sudden he muttered: "Yea, the whole world's
wealth
Would come to me if I might seize this gold;
If I denied and crushed all love and lust,
A greater might and power would come to me!"

Then with a laugh of hate and conquering craft
His despicable purpose wakened fierce;
Scorned in his love and nursing bitterness,

The
Rape
of the
Gold

He saw full vengeance. Lust of gold awoke!
He must have power and rule the world with
 might;
Here almost within reach the magic gift.
With a wild leap he started: "Scoff and scorn!
You lie, and cheat the Nibelung of love!
You cannot keep him from your hoarded gold!"

Fiercely he mustered all his craft and strength,
Raging he clambered up the slippery rock,
Sliding and tumbling, but persistent wrath
Upheld him, and he reached the glittering crest.

The nymphs were screaming in a wild affright,
And darted here and there with frenzied cries:
"Yo-ho! Help! help! This madman comes to
 rob!
The imp is mad! His lust has crazed his blood!
See how the water spurts where he has sprung!
See how he trails the spume and slime like
 smoke!"

They laughed and shrieked in mingled fear and
 glee;
But Alberich, close to the glittering gold,
Stretched forth his hands with eager clutch,
 and cried:
"Well may you be dismayed, and shriek and cry!
Dark are your ways! Henceforth in darkness be!
See how I quench the gleaming light ye love!
See how I rend your gold from off the rock!
And for my vengeance I will make the ring!
For hear me, floods and gods! this vow I make,—
Henceforth and ever all love I forswear!"

With rage terrific and with desperate might,
He tore away the lustrous yellow gold,—
It seemed itself to shriek in agony,
And in a moment all its glow was dead.

The
Rape
of the
Gold

Quickly he clambered downward in his flight,
His fingers clutching tight the precious mass;
Then crawling in a fissure of the rock,
His treasure and his gruesome self were gone.

Then sudden darkness overspread the flood,
Blackness and terror mingled in dread night.
Vainly the nymphs pursued the fleeting foe,
Vainly they screamed and shrieked in utter
woe:

“Help! help! A robber! Save our precious
gold!”

Too late! Far, far below they heard a laugh,
The rough, rude laugh of Alberich the dwarf.
Too late! The gold is gone, the light has fled!
The floods of darkness sweep o’er all the rocks.
Too late! an awful silence shuddered deep
In all the valley, save the piteous moans
Of the fair sisters overwhelmed with grief.
The black waves surge in sorrow through the
depths,
And all the Rhine is wailing in its woe.

THE RHINE-GOLD. PART II

THE PACT WITH THE GIANTS



ERE in the cloud-lands far across the
Rhine

The mists in heavy billows roll along,
And pile themselves in massy heaps

of fog;

But now the day is clearing, and the dawn
Sends its faint arrows o'er an open space
Upon the mountain's summit towering high.
The sunrise drives away the trailing mists,
And there upon a massive rocky cliff
Rises a castle with its glittering towers,
Splendid with turrets and with pinnacles,—
A glorious stronghold on the mountain heights,
Shining resplendent in the sunrise sheen.

Before the castle yawns a deep ravine,
Where flows in majesty the lordly Rhine.
And here upon this nearer river-side
Are flowery meadows, fair with bloom of spring,
And fragrant with the perfume on the breeze.
More beautiful they are than fairest dreams;
Here might the gods abide in perfect joy,—
And so they do! For here upon the sward,
Amid the flowers, half covered by a bower
Of climbing roses and fair, fragrant vines,
Slumber two gods of that rare elder time,—
Wotan, the eldest and the chief of gods,
Champion of justice, sovereign of the world,
And Fricka, beauteous lady and true spouse,
Fair guardian of the law and marriage rights.
Peaceful they slept until the morning light
Had reddened in the east to fiery glow;
Then Fricka woke, and started in amaze,

The Pact with the Giants

For there before her eyes upon the height
Rose high the castle, never seen before.
Quickly she spoke: "Wotan, my lord, awake!"

But he still dreaming murmured in his sleep:
"What rapture now to see my heavenly hall,
Close warded from all foes by gate and gulf!
The highest valor among souls of men,
The everlasting strength of valiant souls,
Shall here be brought for endless fame and
name!"

Again she sought to rouse him from his dream:
"Wake, good my lord, from rosy fantasies!
Awake, arise, and see thy visions true!"

Slowly he woke, and slightly raised himself;
And splendid was great Wotan to behold.
Highest and holiest of the gods was he,
Lofty, majestic, gray with wisdom's might.
When oft upon his throne of state he sat,
An eagle helmet wore he on his head,
And in his hand he held a sacred spear,
Thick carven with the ancient magic runes;
Upon his arms gleamed golden amulets;
Two ravens perched upon his shoulders broad,
And at his feet two snarling wolves kept guard.
When going abroad on secret errands bent,
He laid aside insignia of state,
And wore a mantle sky-blue flecked with gray,
Symbol of fleecy clouds and the blue sky,
And on his brow a hat broad brimmed, low
drawn;
So in his flowing mantle was he clad



The Vision of Valhalla

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The
Pact
with the
Giants

Here on the meadows, and he woke and rose, —
Then in amazement saw the castle towers,
And all the glory. In delight he cried:
“’T is finished! And my glorious dream is true!
The mighty work stands there in splendid
stone!

See on the heights the home of the fair gods!
How stately, yea, how proudly rise its towers,
Resplendent in their beauty and their strength,
Just as in dreams I saw it in great joy;
Just as I ordered turrets, towers, and walls,
So I behold it in the eternal rock,
Mighty and massive as the granite’s self,
Majestic as the mountains in their pride.”

But answered him his spouse with saddened
tone:

“What thou dost welcome I can only dread.
This new-built castle brings thee rapturous
joy;

But I must tremble for poor Freya’s fate, —
Dear sister, victim of a pact unblest!
Recall, thou heedless one, the awful price!
The castle finished, now the bond is due!
Forgettest thou the promise that was made
When thou didst bargain for these castle halls?”

Careless he answered her: “Yea, I recall.
I promised easily the great demand
These giants made who builded me these halls.
A grim and gruesome race these giants are,
But my fair promises o’ertopped their might.
Their brute strength is no match for cunning
craft.

So they have toiled and drudged and fiercely
sweat
And reared for me this castle on the heights.
Thanks to their peerless might, see there it
stands!
But as to price, — nay, worry not for that.”

Yet Fricka was not satisfied and spake:
“Alas, such foolishness, light-hearted, gay,
Such carelessness, foolhardy seems to me!
Had I but known of this most monstrous bond,
Some measures I had taken to prevent;
But ye wise men, confiding in yourselves,
Allowed no woman’s wisdom in your plans;
Before us ye were silent as the grave, —
In secret with the giants made your bond;
So, without shame, ye did agree to give
Freya, my glorious sister, as the price.
Nothing you men hold holy or of worth,
When once the lust of power is in your hearts.”

But Wotan answered in defiant mood:
“Thy sister Freya felt not so at all, —
She bade me build the glorious castle here!”

Half-meditating, Fricka still spoke on:
“Yea, without shame the daily ways of men.
At times my consort’s own unfaithfulness
Has brought me care and trouble manifold.
Much I have studied how to hold his love
When heedless he has wandered from my side.
Now let me ask him what his secret thought. —
Perchance these castle halls so new and grand,
So full of rapture for thy valiant soul,

May for a while allure thy willing heart,
And bind thee to the softer bonds of home.
Yet, tell me, didst thou think of rest and peace,
Of kindly quiet in the joys of home,
When thou wert planning for these castle halls?
Was not thy thought of strife and war alone,
Of greater power and might to come to thee?
Has not this glorious castle risen here
To stir up tempests and the battle-storms?"

Smiling, the mighty Wotan answered her:
"Wouldst thou, dear spouse, close fasten me
to thee,
And hold me in my castle's small confine?
Yet something to my godhood thou must grant:
While my first duty in my castle lies,
Yet I must win the outer world to me.
No one that lives but loves to wander forth,
And see the world and note its change of scene,
And be a part of all its life and strife, —
That pleasure must be ever granted me."

Whereat she answered, nursing still her grief:
"Unloving art thou, and dost grieve me sore!
For worthless baubles, yea, for ruthless might,
Thou tramplest under foot in rude contempt
True love and a true woman's matchless
worth!"

And as she spoke she rose in majesty,
Queen of the gods and patroness of law,
Of mother's love and all the rites of home,
Clothed in snow-white, most stately, beautiful;

Girdled with golden girdle, hung with keys;

The
Pact
with the
Giants

Crowned with a wondrous crown of heron-plumes.

'Tis said a distaff often graced her hands,
And oft a stork walked by her, gift of life.
Indignant now she rose, and glorious stood
In silent splendor, nursing noble wrath.

Earnest spake Wotan, answering her again:
"Thou dost recall that when I sought thy love
And won thee for my wife long years ago,
One eye I wagered,—yea, and lost it too!
Perchance thou thinkest me a trifle blind;
Yet far more blindly art thou blaming me.
Thou knowest that I honor women more
Than sometimes pleases thee. And dost thou
think
That I will let our Freya dear depart?
Not for a moment have I dreamed of that!"

Then cried his spouse: "Now save her, if thou
canst,
For hither in distress she comes for help!"

E'en as she spoke, came Freya in all haste,—
Freya, the fairest soul that ever breathed,
Goddess of beauty and of maiden's love,
Herself the best belovèd of the gods;
Blue eyes and golden hair, fair summer's signs;
Crowned with the flowery myrtles, loved of
brides;
Around her neck a necklace wondrous rare,
And in her hands always fair flowers and fruits.
Now in distress she ran to them with tears,
And cried: "O help me, sister dear! O help!

Protect me, father! Save me from foul hands!
Fasolt, the giant from the rocky heights,
Draws near to seize me as his lawful prey!"

The Pact with the Giants

But Wotanspake: "Nay, let him rage and fume,
Till Loki comes. Hast thou not Loki seen?"

With scorn, fair Fricka spoke: "Till Loki
comes!

Surely thou dost not trust his lying craft!
Already he has wronged us many times,
And sets new snares for our unwary feet!"

Bold Wotan answered her: "Where might
alone

Is all-sufficient for the wished-for deed,
I ask no help of any living thing;
But where I am compelled to meet the craft
And artifice of cunning-witted foes,
Then Loki helps me with his wily ways.
'T was he who craftily arranged and made
This present compact with the giant foe.
Never would I have given my consent
To that great price, unless he gave his craft;
He promised me that Freya should escape,
And I am fully trusting to his word."

Then Fricka sneered: "He leaves thee in the
lurch!

Here come the giants striding swift and
strong—
Where lurks thy lying partner and his craft?"

Whereat fair Freya, sore affrighted, cried:

The Pact with the Giants

"Where are my brothers that they help me not?
My father gives me not his shield and strength!
Come, brother Donner, hasten to my aid!
Come, brother Froh, O save me from this fate!"

While Fricka still in scorn and anger spake:
"This is the likely way of selfish men:
Basely they bargain, easily they wrong;
And now they leave thee to thine awful fate!"

Then came the giants nearer with great
strides,—
Fasolt and Fafner, armed with massive clubs.
Dreadful and dark were they, and rough and
rude,
Rivals and haters of the heavenly gods;
Begotten in the vast and grim abyss
Upon the outer edges of the world;
Hairy and coarse, and savage in their ways;
Great heavy hands, and sprawling feet and flat;
Big bulging eyes, and teeth like tusks of boars;
Thick matted hair, and long and grizzly beards.

With harsh and muttering voice, dread Fasolt
spoke:
"Wotan, we come! For while ye slept, we built!
We drudged, we toiled, we heaped the massive
rocks;
We reared the tower and turret, piled the wall,
And made for thee this fortress grim and great!
There stands the castle shimmering in the light!
Come, enter in, and pay the promised wage!"

Frowning upon them fiercely, Wotan said:

"Yea, workmen, speak. What wages do you want?"

What wages will suffice for settlement?"

The
Pact
with the
Giants

But boldly Fasolt spake: "The wage was fixed;
We settled that before we raised a stone.
Surely thy promise thou hast not forgot, —
The price was Freya, fairest of the fair, —
She is the wage that we shall carry home!"

Firmly and fiercely, Wotan quickly spoke:
"Perchance this wage was mentioned in the
bond,

But be not too insistent on the price!
Some circumstances now have changed my
plans.

Choose ye some other wage, — some greater
one, —

Something that will be just as good for you, —
For Freya now I cannot offer you!"

Speechless with wrath, dread Fasolt glared at
him:

"What dost thou say? Fair Freya not for us?
What treachery this? And wilt thou break thy
word?

Those sacred runes writ on thy sacred spear, —
Are they but mockery and idle sport?"

And Fafner also raged in bitter scorn:

"My faithful brother, careful be thy words!
Thou art a fool to think he can be false!"

While Fasolt added: "Mighty son of light,

The Pact with the Giants

Careless thou swayest, playing with thy word !
Harken and guard what thou art saying now !
Thy contracts surely hold, for what thou art
And all thy power is under solemn pact,
Is settled with assurance well defined !
More wise thou art than we, and bindest us,
Free and unwary, to a friendly peace ;
Yet cursèd be thy wisdom, fair and false,
And far shall flee the peace within thy realm,
When, wisdom changed to folly, truth to lies,
Thou breakest faith and doth cast off thy bond.
Thus shall a simple giant judge thy case,—
O high and wise one, take the warning word !”

But Wotan answered: “Sly it was of you
To take as if in solemn truth and pact
What we had only settled as a jest.
Surely you did not think we really meant
To give you Freya,— but some splendid prize
As precious as our Freya and as fair.
What use her charmstogiant clowns like you !”

More angry Fasolt fiercely answered him:
“Thou floutest us and holdest us in scorn!
Unjust, I say, unrighteous and unkind!
Thou reignest radiant in the heavenly realms,
A regal and a noble-hearted race;
Then foolish thou dost long for castle halls,—
A palace and a fortress built in stone;
Whoso will build it, here is pledge and price,—
A woman wondrous, fairest of the fair;
Then we, great blockheads, longing for a wife,
Essay the task, and toil and drudge and sweat
To raise a fortress for thy foolish whim,

And win a woman to delight our hearts,—
Thus both the deeds are done and we have
come,—
And dost thou mean to break thy bargain
now?"

The
Pact
with the
Giants

While Fafner added, daring in his wrath:
"Come, brother, cease thy foolish, idle talk,
And let me tell them what our bargain means,
And why we must have Freya for our own.
'Tis not so much she would delight our hearts,
We care not whether she be fair or foul;
But she would suit our purpose and our plans,—
We want her for the reason, clear and wise,
That all the gods would have her in their
midst,—

Within her garden golden apples grow,
And she alone knows well the secret gift
To make her orchards rich with living gold;
This golden fruit grants to her kith and kin
A beautiful and an immortal youth;
Blighted and sere would all their beauty wane,
Weary and worn in sadness would they fade,
If Freya should depart from out their midst,—
This is the prize for which we moiled and
toiled,—

We want fair Freya and her golden fruit,
And from the gods we tear her ruthlessly!"

Astounded and dismayed, great Wotan heard,
And murmured in impatience to himself:
"Why does our Loki linger and delay?"

But Fasolt blurted: "Give us answer now!"

The
Pact
with the
Giants

Again spake Wotan: "Fix on other spoil!"

Firm held the giant to his one demand:
"No other! Freya only! She is ours!"

While Fafner cried: "Yea, Freya! Come with us!"

With that the giants rushed to seize their prey,
Who from them fled in dire distress and
screamed:

"Help! Help! O save me from these ruffians!"
Scarce had the air reëchoed with her cry,
When Froh and Donner, her two brothers
strong,

Came leaping to her aid. And valiant Froh
Was like the rushing of a gladsome wind;
For god is he of sunshine, dawn, and joy;
God of the summer showers and golden grain;
God of the rainbow, of all hope and peace;
Of feasting, dancing, and the Yule-tide cheer;
He brought a joyous tumult as he rushed,
And clasped her in his arms, and cried aloud:
"Come, Freya dear! My arms shall be thy
shield!

Fall back, ye brutes! Froh guards the goddess
now!"

And Donner shook the welkin as he came,
God of the tempest and the angry storm;
Of thunder, lightning, and the howling winds.
He showed his mighty thews and fierce red
beard;

He slung a mighty hammer huge and black;
He rode upon a rumbling chariot.

Kindly he could be, wrathful oft he was,
Driving away the darkness and the cold.
Now with his tempest-soul aroused, he glow-
ered

Like frowning rock before his startled foes,
And halted them with fierce words fiercely
spoke:

“Fasolt and Fafner, cease your madness now!
Or would ye feel my hammer’s thundering
blow?”

And Fafner cried: “Why shouldst thou threaten
us?”

And Fasolt cried: “Why must thou thrust in
here?

We want no quarrel and we seek no fight;
We only come to get our promised wage.”

But Donner swung his hammer high in air,
And threatened them with fierce and scornful
words:

“Many a giant I have paid in full,
And rascals always am I quick to pay.
Come hither! I will deal you out your due.
Ye shall have more than ever ye have dreamed!”

Hot grew his anger raging at the brutes;
His lightning flashed; his crashing thunder
rolled;

Again his hammer swung; and blows had come,
But Wotan held them back and spoke again,
With outstretched spear between the angry
foes:

The
Pact
with the
Giants

"Avaunt, thou thunderer so hot and fierce!
Nothing is gained in this by show of force!
This bond is writ upon my sacred spear,—
Wotan is ever faithful to his runes.
These giants shall receive most generous wage!
Spare then thy hammer and its thunder-blows!"

As Freya heard, she cried in deep despair:
"Woe's me! for Wotan leaves me to my fate."

And Fricka looked at Wotan as she asked:
"Thou meanest it, O cruel and shameless man?"

But Wotan turned away, and as he turned
His eye caught sight of Loki hurrying fast,
Swinging and swaying as a floating mist,
Flashing at times like pallid, flickering flame;
And in a great relief great Wotan cried:
"At last thou comest, Loki! Dost thou haste
To straighten out with crafty ways and arts
The hapless bargain that thy cunning wrought?"

But Loki, who had climbed up from the vale,
Breathing as if a glowing fire within,
Breathing thin, flickering flame, yet cold as
mist,
Strange mingling of fierce ardor, cold deceit,
Calmly and gayly answered the demands:
"What hapless bargain have I made for thee?
Surely thou dost not mean that splendid stroke
To which I helped thee with the giants here?
That was a contract worthy of ourselves!
For see! I never needed home or halls;
In depths and heights I fly at happy will,

And house and hearth mean naught to me and mine;
But Froh and Donner, gallant gods are they!
They longed for dwelling-place and fixed abode;
They had desires for wooing and home loves;
They must enjoy a hearth and its delights,
A stately castle and a fortress strong;
And as their own was Wotan's wish and will,
Behold it now, this stately house and court, —
Palace and fortress in one splendid pile!
Fair to the eye it is, and firmly built, —
Its towering walls I tested well and proved.
Fasolt and Fafner failed not in their word;
Each stone lies firm and solid in its place.
Therefore ye see I have not idle been,
As some perchance that here speak slightingly.
This work delayed me, but no sluggard I, —
He lies who calls my life a slothful life."

And Wotan answered: "Artfully and well
Thou slippest out, thou always slippest out.
Therefore, my skilful schemer, use thy wits:
Unloose the bargain, yet uphold my word.
Remember, in the whole immortal realm,
I was thine only friend among the gods;
I vouched for thee when others doubted thee, —
Now speak and solve this problem on our hands.
When we contracted for this fortress fair,
And these rude builders, in their foolish way,
Demanded fairest Freya as their wage,
Thou knowest that I seemed to give consent
Only when thou hadst made me well assured
We need not keep the letter of the bond,
But could find easier way to meet demands."

The
Pact
with the
Giants

But crafty Loki smiling answered him:
"Not quite as thou hast said it did I say.
What I did swear was this,—with greatest care
To try to think of ways and means to save!
I had no doubt, I said, it could be done,—
But never did I swear to do it sure.
What if no ways or means could e'er be found?
What if my plans impossible should prove?
How could I promise what I only hoped?"

Fair Fricka heard him with a sneer, and said:
"Now, Wotan, see the slippery scamp we trust!"

While Froh exclaimed: "Loki, thou lurking lie!
Well art thou named—on low-key all thy
deeds!"

And Donner damned him with a fiercer name,
And harshly cried: "Yea, cursèd, cringing
coward,
Now will I quench thee with a hammer's blow!"
But Loki smiled, and well he knew to smile,—
The god of craft, of mischief and deceit,
The god of lies and subterfuge and stealth,
The god of fun, of slyness, sneers, and doubts,
The god of flickering fires, uncertain, thin,
The god of evil in the guise of light,
The arch-deceiver and the prince of lies,—
Yet smiling still, the wily Loki spoke:
"And so to serve you, Froh and Donner both,
To screen your blundering bargain and your-
selves,
You blockheads now would scorn and shame
poor me!"

Fiercely they set upon him. But at once
Wotan restrained them, with the quiet words:
"I pray you leave my friend in peace to me!
You do not know our Loki's cunning craft;
The longer that we have to wait for him,
The wiser and more subtle are his wiles!"

But Fafner yelled: "We wait no longer here!
We want our wage, and we will take it now!"

And Fasolt cried: "Too long our wages halt!"

Again great Wotan unto Loki spoke:
"Hark now, my strategist, and stand the test.
Why didst thou wander in the world so far,
And why so tardy when I wanted thee?"

Then spoke the smooth-tongued Loki for himself:

"Ingratitude is ever Loki's lot,
Nor even dost thou seem to understand!
'T was for thy sake alone I sallied forth
And rode through storms to earth's remotest
bounds;
Hurried to where the four seas bind the world,
To seek a worthy ransom for our Freya;
Something that would the giants' hearts delight,
And be both just and right and generous.
In vain I searched, for soon I learned full well
That in the whole round world naught is so rare,
And nothing in man's heart can fill the place
Of woman's worth and woman's dear delight!"

Astonished at his words, they murmured low,

The
Pact
with the
Giants

But he continued telling of his search :
"As far and wide as life doth ebb and flow,
In water, earth, and air I wandered long;
Much did I ask, and many I besought,
In lands where sinews reign and seedlings
spring,

What for a man might better be esteemed
Than woman's worth and woman's dear de-
light,—

What can exceed the preciousness of love?
But far and wide as life doth ebb and flow
With laughter only was my question met;
For nowhere in the sea nor earth nor air
Have I found greater things than woman's
love,—

Naught can exceed the preciousness of love!
Never but once in all my wanderings
Did I meet one who had forsworn all love,
Denounced it, crushed it, torn it from his
heart,—

He gave up woman's love for ruddy gold.
The fair Rhine-daughters told me of their woe,
For it was Alberich who stole their gold.
Because he failed to win them to his love,
He swore revenge and robbed them of their
gold,—

The ruddy Rhine-gold, long their pride and joy!
Now gloats he over it, esteems it far
More precious than the loveliest woman's love.
He holds it as the world's most radiant gift.
The fair Rhine-daughters are in sad lament
To lose their glittering glory from the deep;
And unto thee they turn, O Wotan great,
That on the robber thou mayst justice wreak,

And give again their Rhine-gold to its waves,
To be their joy and glory evermore!
I promised them to bring their case to thee,
And as thou seest, stand I to my pledge."

the
once
with the
diamond

Then Wotan answered: "Foolish are thy
words,
Unless perchance they hide some subtle wiles.
Here thou dost see me sunk in dire distress,—
How can I hope to heal another's woe?"

But Fasolt, who had listened to the talk
About the gold, now spoke to Fafner, low:
"Didst hear that word about the precious gold?
This may be something worth our while to
have.

Methinks I envy him that gleaming gold.
Already hath the Nibelung much harm
Done to us both, and slyly slipped away.
More evil will he work us with this gold."

And Fafner muttered: "Yea, thou speakest
true!

The Nibelung contrives some greater wrong
When he grows mighty with this wondrous
gold.

Tell us, good Loki, tell us speaking fair,
What greatness can this wondrous gold confer,
That makes it precious to the Nibelung,—
Precious beyond all else, beyond all love?"

Whereat the wily Loki answered them:
"It is a glittering plaything in the depths,
A glory for the daughters of the Rhine;

The
Pact
with the
Giants

But taken thence and fashioned to a ring,
This magic ring is full of subtle force, —
It gives to its possessor matchless might,
It makes him master of the whole wide world."

And Wotan added: "Yea, full oft to me
Have come strange rumors of the Rhine-gold's
power.

A rune of riches lights its ruddy glow.
He who has skill to mould it to a ring
Shall win resistless might and boundless
wealth."

Fair Fricka asks: "Pray tell me this one thing
About this glittering bauble, — Will its sheen
Serve a fair woman's beauty to adorn?"

Quickly spoke Loki: "'T is the very thing
'T would deck her beauty and assure her heart.
A jewel most rare, this radiant mass of gold,
When finely fashioned to a glittering ring;
And it could also hold a wandering spouse
Ruled by the magic of the golden ring."

With sad reproaches, fairest Fricka sighed:
"Would that my spouse might gain this gold
for me!"

Nodding assent, but with another thought,
Great Wotan answered: "Thou art right, my
spouse;
That magic gold belongs in truth to me.
But tell me, Loki, by what art or means
Can I make mine this mighty matchless ring?"

And Loki spoke: "A certain magic rune
Can fashion that red gold into a ring,
Yet none can ever know the magic rune
But he who love forswears for evermore.
Ah, Wotan, thou dost turn away at that?
Thou wouldst not give up love for all the world?
Well, take it not to heart. Thou art too late,
Forswarthy Alberich paused not, nor quailed,—
He gave up love forthwith, and won the spell,
And fashioned for himself the matchless ring."

And Donner cried: "Then slaves we all become
Under the magic of this ugly dwarf,
Unless we ravish from him this gold ring!"

Great Wotan cried: "That ring must be mine
own!"

While Froh exclaimed: "If now it is a ring,
Then easily it may be snatched from him,
Without forswearing love or losing aught!"

Said Loki: "True, we may secure the ring
Without much craft. 'T is easy as child's play."

And Wotan asked: "Advise us then,—the
means?"

Gayly spoke Loki: "Steal the ring, I say!
What stole the thief, that steal from him again.
Nothing is neater than this simple plan;
Thus punish him for his outrageous crime.
Only remember Alberich is shrewd,
And fights with artful and with wileful foils.

The
Wart
with the
Giants

More shrewd be thou to overreach the rogue, —
So thou mayst win the glittering, ruddy gold,
Restore it to the daughters of the Rhine,
And ease their sad lamentings unto thee."

But Wotan cried: "The daughters of the
Rhine!

Thou thinkest that I waste the ring on them,
And waste thy happy counsel and rare craft?"

And Fricka cried: "The daughters of the Rhine!
Nay, of these water-witches speak no more,
For many men—I know it to my woe—
Have perished by them, lured and lost in love!"

Silent stood Wotan, struggling with himself.
What in this fateful crisis shall he do?
Shall he do evil that fair good may come?
The other gods expectant look to him.
Meanwhile the giants have talked much and
long,

And crafty Fafner counselled Fasolt thus:
"Believe me, Fasolt, more than Freya now
We need the magic of that glittering gold,
Nor shall we yearn for her eternal youth
When we shall wield the gold's all-mastering
might."

So they agree, and Fafner, spokesman, cried:
"Hear, Wotan, these our final terms to thee!
Freya shall stay with thee in peace. We ask
A lesser forfeit than our promised price.
Give to the rough old giants for their wage
That glittering gold, the Nibelung's red hoard!"

But Wotan answered: "Wandering are your wits.
How can I give to you, you shameless rogues,
The glittering gold that is not mine to own?"

Of the
fact
with the
Giants

Yet Fafner still persisted: "'Twas hard toil
For us to build yon fortress on the heights,
But easy 'tis for thee, with cunning craft,—
What we could never do with our rude ways,—
To catch the Nibelung and work thy will."

Indignantly great Wotan answered them:
"For your sake shall I enter troublous ways,—
For your sake seek to fetter this sly foe?
Shameless ye are, and greedy beyond words!"

Whereat fierce Fasolt rushed to Freya's side,
Seized her and held her with the angry words:
"Come hither, Freya! Thou must go with us!
Thou art our hostage till our wage is paid."

Fair Freya cried aloud, and wept and wailed,
And all the gods were moved with sorrow sore.

Then Fafner spoke: "We take her far from
hence,
And hold her as a hostage till the night.
Then, mark me well, we come again to thee,
And if thou dost not pay the forfeit then,
The Rhine-gold fair and glittering and red"—

Quick interrupted Fasolt: "Then at end
Is all our friendship! And fair Freya then
Is forfeit, and is ours for evermore!"

The
Pact
with the
Giants

Again fair Freya wept: "O sister, save!
O brother, help me in my dire distress!"

Now both the giants seized their fainting prey,
And in their arms they swiftly bore her off.
Dismayed and stricken in their awful grief,
The troubled gods could neither speak nor
move,

Until afar they heard her bitter sobs,
Full of deep horror. Sudden Froh cried out:
"Quick, on their track! Let us haste after
them!"

While Donner cried: "Yea, come! She must be
saved!"

Spake Loki as he watched the giants' flight,
Haling their victim down the gleaming glen:
"I see them shambling over stock and stone
Straight down the valley! There, they reach the
flood

Of the Rhine waters, and they flounder in!
Poor Freya in affright clings fast to them!
Ho! how the stupids stumble in the waves!
I see them awkward mount the further bank!
Again they stride along with might and main;
They will not rest until their land is reached!"

Anxious he turned and looked upon the gods;
But something strange was passing in their
midst,—

A pallid change was coming like a cloud.
He cried: "What dreameth Wotan now so
dread?

What spell hath come upon the heavenly gods?"

For now a pale mist throws its ghastly light
In every corner of the immortal realm;
The gods seem drooping like the autumn
flowers;
Like those who feel the withering touch of
death,

The faces of the gods grow old and wan
And haggard, and in quick alarm they gaze
At Wotan, now so hoary, pale, and worn,
His sad eyes fixed in silence on the ground.

Then Loki cried: "A mist deceives my eyes,
Or am I mocked by some weird, awful dream?
How quick has all your beauty faded out,
And from your cheeks the radiant bloom is fled,
And vanished is the sparkle of your eyes!
Flag not, my Froh, the day hath just begun!
And Donner, do not thus thy hammer drop!
What aileth Fricka? Doth her soul rebel
At all this sullen grayness and deep gloom
That covers Wotan like a hoary age?"

For Fricka cried: "Woe's me! What means it
all?"

And Donner: "See, my hand doth sink and fail!"
And Froh: "My heart has almost ceased to
beat!"

Sudden cried Loki: "List! this is the fault!
Ye have not eaten Freya's fruit to-day,—
And all its virtue vanished into air!
Her golden apples that each day you ate
Preserved your beauty and your radiant youth.
Now she is captive who the garden kept,

The
Pact
with the
Giants

And all her apples waste among the leaves,
Full soon to dry and rot, and worthless fall.
With me 'tis different. She scouted me
And niggard kept from me the precious fruit;
So that I ever had but half the power
That you immortals loved to live and show;
For ye were nourished on the golden fruit
And took your daily strength and youth from
them.

The giants seem to know this fact full well,—
Against your lives they make conspiracy.
Rouse ye if ye would meet their evil plans.
Here is the case,—without the golden fruit
Ye have grown gray and gloomy, wan and
worn,—
Soon will the whole world mock your withered
might,
Soon will the stock and race of gods be gone."

Poor Fricka wailed: "Wotan, unhappy lord,
Behold the doom thy smiling folly brings!
We are o'erwhelmed by shame most desperate."

But Wotan, who had weighed in sullen gloom
The mighty matters of the desperate case,
At last was full determined to the deed,
And forward came with grim resolve, and cried:
"Come, Loki, bring thy wits. We travel far
Below the earth where dwell the Nibelungs,
For I must win the Rhine-gold for mine own!"

Then Loki smiled: "Yea, listen to their cries;
The fair Rhine-daughters put their hopes in
thee."

But Wotan roughly spoke: "Peace, prattler,
peace!
'Tis Freya, noble Freya, needs our help."

Then Loki cried: "Yea, where thou wilt, I
guide
Swiftly and gladly. Shall we go this way
Down through these pleasant waters of the
Rhine?"

But Wotan answered: "Nay, not through the
Rhine."
So Loki smiled again, and answered quick;
"Another way there is,—the brimstone gorge!
See, here it is,—that dark cleft in the rock!
So, let us swing ourselves, and easy slip
Down to its ugly depths and loathsome fumes."

A moment looked they down into the void, —
A yawning, dark abyss. Then Loki grasped
The rough rocks of the crumbling precipice;
Lightly he climbed down in the rocky gloom
Amid the sulphur vapors rolling up.

While Wotan cried: "Ye gods, till evening
wait!
I swear to bring your lost youth back to you.
For you I go to seek redeeming gold."
Then Wotan clambered into the deep cleft
Amid the sulphur fumes and darkening smoke.

And Donner called: "Success to thee, my lord!"
And Froh cried out: "Good luck, my lord, good
luck!"

The
Pact
with the
Giants

While Fricka sighed: "Return full soon, my
love,
And soothe the troubles of thine anxious
spouse."

Thicker and blacker grew the sulphurous
smoke,
The sooty grimness, and the murky air,
More awful gaped the gloomy chasm's depths,
And soon the heavy fumes and fog have spread,
And all is hid in darkness and despair.

THE RHINE-GOLD. PART III

SLAVES OF THE RING



AR, far below the ground are gloomy depths, —

A mighty cavern, rocky, dark, and vast, —

A many-chambered cave with passages
That yawn in darkness far as eye can reach.
A flaring torch is smoking here and there
That makes the awful darkness visible.
A sound of clinking anvils comes afar,
As if from myriads of toiling slaves,
Drudging their lives in subterranean gloom.
This is the murky realm of Nibelheim, —
Beneath the gladsome earth, another world.
Night-dark the land of swarthy Nibelungs,
A pigmy brood, a wondrous race of dwarfs, —
Men, women, children, — ugly, swart, and sad.
The dawnless day they toil and drudge and sweat,

Delving in earth for ores, and at the forge
Melting and welding metals for their lord.
Once were they happy, toiling for themselves,
And frolicking and dancing. Now they drudge
Both night and day, slaves of a tyrant cruel.
This lord is crafty Alberich the dwarf,
Who since he wields the magic of the ring
Has laid a heavy hand upon the gnomes,
And bent them to his strong and cunning will.
He has a brother, Mime, skilled of hand
At all the rough arts of the smithy's forge,
But Alberich had never lost him love,
And now worse treated him than any knave, —
Oft beat him sore in very merriment,
And laughed to see his writhing and his tears.

Slaves of the Ring

Long since he flogged him stoutly with the lash
And ordered him to do what he would charge, —
To make a tarnhelm out of woven steel,
A wishing-cap of cunning-wrought design;
Slowly he told him all the secret way
It must be wrought, — the thong impressed the
words, —
And Mime gnashed his teeth and went to work.

To-day the swarthy Alberich had come,
As black and gruesome as the cavern's self;
And by the ear he dragged his abject slave,
His shrieking brother Mime. Quick he spoke,
His voice like hissing steam through the heavy
smoke:
"Come here! come here! Thou spiteful little
imp!
And smartly shall I pinch thy ugly ear
Unless thou yieldest now upon this spot
That metal ornament I ordered made."

And Mime wailed and howled and cried aloud:
"Oho! oho! Let me alone, I say!
'T is finished. I have followed thy command;
With moil and toil I made it, drudging hard.
Now take thy scratching fingers from my ears!"

Unloosing him, said Alberich: "Thou rogue,
Why dost thou hesitate to hand it out?"

And Mime muttered: "I was still afraid
Some little part might not be perfect yet."

Asked Alberich: "What part not perfect yet?"

And Mime showed the thing and looked it o'er,
And hesitating said: "Why, here — and there!"

But Alberich: "Away with here and there!
Give me the ornament! Come, give it up!"

Roughly he seized his brother's ear again,
And Mime, in his terror screaming out,
Let fall a piece of wondrous metal-work
That he had held concealed within his hand.

Then Alberich quick picked it from the ground,
And close examined it, and joyful cried:
"Behold, thou rascal, all is perfect here,
Smithied and welded to a nicety!
So, thou great scamp, thou plottest to deceive
And keep the wondrous work for thine own self,
Which without me thou never couldst have
wrought!
Have I not read thy thoughts, thou wily thief?"

Whereat he took the wondrous metal-work
And, as a tarnhelm, set it on his head,
And spoke: "This tarnhelm finely fits my head.
Now will it show the magic of its might?
See, I will test it: 'Night and darkness, come!
Make me invisible! Let naught be seen!'"

And in a trice he vanished out of sight,
A cloud of smoke alone to mark his place.

From the invisible, he slyly called:
"Look sharp, my brother! Dost thou see me
now?"

Astounded, Mime gazed around and asked:
"Where art thou? Not a shred of thee I see."

A laughing voice came from the empty air:
"Thou canst not see me. Feel me then a bit!
Take this, thou faithful scamp, for thy sly
tricks!"

With that an unseen thong rained cutting blows
On Mime, who in terror writhed and wailed,
Fell prone, and foully shrieked, and cursed with
yells.

And laughing yet again, the voice exclaimed:
"I thank thee, blockhead, for thy clever work.
The tarnhelm's perfect! Well thy work was
done.

Ho! ho! Ye hordes of dwarfs, ye Nibelungs!
Henceforth ye kneel as slaves to Alberich.
He wanders everywhere to watch your work;
No more for you of idle peace and rest, —
Ye must work on. He watches you unseen,
And when you least take note of him, he notes;
Ye are his bounden slaves for evermore.
Ho! ho! Ye Nibelungs, hear him! He comes,
The lord and master of all Nibelungs!"

Like cloud of smoke, black Alberich moved on
Into the cave's most gloomy passages;
His boasts and scoldings echoed from afar,
And howls and cries from driven hordes of
dwarfs.

At last the dismal noises died away,
And Mime cowered alone, and groaned in pain.

Out from a gloomy cleft Loki sly stepped
With noble Wotan; looked around, and spoke:
"This is the cavern of the Nibelungs.
How strange the torches flare in this gray
gloom!"

But Wotan cried: "Who moans so piteous?
What is it lying here upon the ground?"

And Loki, bending down, to Mime spoke:
"What strange beast's whimpering and whin-
ing here?"

And Mime only answered: "Woe! oh, woe!"

Then Loki spoke: "Hey, Mime! is it thou?
Thou merry imp, what pinched and bruised
thee so?"

But Mime only cried: "Leave me alone!"

And Loki spoke: "Yea, certainly I will,
And even more. I come to bring thee help."

Half rising, Mime cried: "What help for me?
My cruel-hearted brother is my lord,
And I must slave for him and his behests."

Then Loki asked: "But tell me, Mime, pray,
What gave him power to bind thee as his slave?"

And Mime answered: "Lately has he wrought
Out of the Rhine-gold's mass a ruddy ring,
And with its craft and magic masters us.

Slaves of the Ring

With this dread mystic ring he fast enslaves
The darkness-loving hordes of Nibelungs.
In former days our anvils sounded loud
To make fair ornaments for loving wives,
Or dainty playthings for our little ones;
Lightly we laughed, or sung our songs of toil.
But now this wretch has made us slaves to
him,
Drives us to dig the ore from deepest depths,
And toil and moil and drudge for him alone.
Through this red ring of gold he learns to trace
Where unknown riches hide within the earth;
Then we must follow, dig it from its depths,
Melt up the ore and mould it into bars;
So must we slave for him both day and night,—
Yea, without peace or pause, must heap his
hoard.”

Sly Loki asked: “And wert thou lazy then,
And felt the summons of his stinging lash?”

Poor Mime answered: “Yea, ill-starred am I;
He holds me in a bitter, endless thrall!
Lately he made me forge a helmet strange;
Told me the cunning ways to fashion it.
Well could I see it hid some matchless power,
This strange design I wove from shining steel;
Then did I covet for myself this helm,
And all the magic that was hid in it,—
Perchance could break my brother's power o'er
me;
Perchance the bully I could overthrow,
And get him fast within my magic craft,
And ravish from him that great golden ring,—

Then I who knelt before him as a slave
Would henceforth be the master and the lord."

Slaves
of the
King

And Loki soft inquired: "How fell it then,
My trickster, that thy plans did not succeed?"

And Mime said: "Ah, though I wrought the
helm,

I did not know the magic and the spell,
And when I guessed the secret it was wrong.
He robbed me of my work when it was done,
And then, alas! too late, I learned from him
What wondrous magic lay within the helm,—
He put it on his head, and in a trice
Invisible he vanished from my eyes;
But all unseen I knew that he was there.
He spoke, and O this foolish back of mine
Was furrowed by the cutting of his lash.
Thus in my folly I received much thanks."
Howling again, he rubbed his aching back.

Then Loki spoke to Wotan: "Now confess,
No easy task is this which brings us here!"

And Wotan answered: "Yea, to foil the foe,
Thy cunning craft must give its utmost aid."

But Mime, noting what the gods had said,
And their high looks and noble ways, inquired:
"Ye strangers, may I ask who you may be
Who ply me with such eager questionings?"

Sly Loki answered: "We are friends to thee.
We come to free the Nibelungs from thrall."

Scarce had he spoken when he heard deep
moans
And groans of swarming hordes of groaning
slaves,
And threats and crackings of a scourging whip,
And Mime whispered: "Hist! 't is Alberich."

But stately Wotan said: "For him we wait."
Upon a stone he quietly sat down,
While crafty Loki loitered at his side.

Then came swart Alberich with brandished
whip,
His tarnhelm in the girdle at his waist;
Cursing he drove a crowd of Nibelungs,—
Dull, grimy slaves, who snarled and gnashed
their teeth;
Upon their backs they bore great bulging packs
Of gold and silver, moulded in strange forms;
Beating and cursing them, he drove them on,
To pile up all the treasure in one heap;
Fiercely he urged them on and yelled at them:
"Hither, ye hounds! Hither, ye lazy brutes!
Pile up the treasure! Heap the glittering hoard!
You there, get up! Move forward, laggard dolts!
Drag up the ingots there, you shameless
rogues!
What, must I help you with my whip? Take
that!"

Then sudden he beheld the strangers there,
And started with a shudder, and he cried:
"Hey! Who are these intruders in this cave?
Mime! Come here, thou pestilent young imp!

Darest thou prattle with these strangers here? Slaves
Go, idle fool, back to thy forge and tools!" of the
Ring

So with his whip uplifted and a threat,
He drove poor Mime to the work again;
And in fierce wrath he scolded the black
dwarfs,
Venting his spite upon them, and with lash
Curling and snapping at the cowering slaves,
Who rushed pell-mell and shrieking, as he
cried:

"Ho! all ye Nibelungs, hurry and haste!
Get you below, and get to work and drudge!
Crawl into these new shafts, and dig the gold!
To work, ye slaves, or taste the biting whip!
Mime shall answer for the idle ones,
Or feel the stinging scourge a hundred-fold!
He knows full well I wander everywhere,
And when you think not have my eye on you.
Why do you loiter? Come, begone, I say!"

Fiercely he watched them as they crawled and
swarmed,
Glaring upon him with their sullen eyes;
Then from his finger, insolent and proud
He drew the magic ring, and kissed it oft;
And held it high aloft above the swarm,
And waved it boldly with the boastful words:
"Tremble and rage, ye crawling swarms of
slaves,
Ye must obey the master of the ring!"

With howls and shrieks, poor Mime and the
swarm

Slaves of the Ring

Of Nibelungs retreated. Quick they slipped
Into the rocky clefts, and clambered down
Into the gloomy depths of loathsome shafts,
To dig and drudge again for glittering ore.

Scornful and wrathful, swarthy Alberich
Glared fiercely at the strangers, and now
asked:

“What mean you here, intruding on my realm?”

And Wotan, with a sly dissembling, spoke:
“Strange rumors late have tingled at our
ears,—

Rare news from the dark land of Nibelheim,—
Of matchless marvels wrought by Alberich!
To see these wonders we have ventured here,
Hoping that he would make us welcome
guests.”

With deep suspicion, Alberich spoke gruff:
“I think you covet this rich realm of ours,
This empire of the Nibelungs' dark hordes.
I know full well, my sly and crafty guests,
That jealousy and envy bring you here!”

But soothing him by old acquaintance's claim,
Sly Loki cried: “Nay, thou shouldst know me
well,

Thou foolish imp! Who am I? Tell me quick,
And stop thy ugly snarling in my face!
Tell me, when in thy freezing lair thou wast,
Where hadst thou found thy light and warm-
ing heat

If Loki had not given thee his gifts?

Tell me, what use thy anvil and thy tools
If Loki had not heated hot thy forge?
Cousin am I to thee,—yea, more,—thy friend!
Surely for these do I deserve much thanks.”

Stanzas
of the
Ring

But Alberich made answer: “Cousin dear,
Thou art a light elf and a wily rogue;
Thou art an easy friend to every scamp
As truly as thou once wert friend to me.
Ah! that delights me; that word is enough,—
Thou art my cousin, my admiring friend,
I need fear nothing more from two such rogues.”

Yet Loki still persisted: “I am sure
That thou canst trust me. Wilt thou not be-
lieve?”

Cried Alberich in scorn: “Yea, I believe,—
Not in thy truth, but thy untruthfulness.
Yet I do fear thee not, nor thy sly wiles.
Entrenched in power, I triumph o’er ye all!”

And Loki spoke: “Thy power hath made thee
bold,
And great and greater waxes thy grim might!”

Proudly spoke Alberich: “Behold the hoard
Of treasures that my minions heap for me!”

Said Loki: “Nothing finer have I seen!”

And carelessly swart Alberich exclaimed:
“This is to-day’s heap, and a scanty pile,—
Greater and rich the store to-morrow brings!”

Slaves
of the
Ring

Then Wotan asked: "What good this gold to thee, —
Here among sullen crowds of Nibelungs,
Where nothing can be bought by treasure-store?"

But Alberich made answer: "Trust to me.
I need the Nibelungs' black realm and hosts
To dig the treasure, heap it up for me, —
Some day with this same treasure, heaped and hid,
I hope to work some wonders. You shall see!
I shall be master of the whole wide world!"

With gentle voice the mighty Wotan spoke:
"And how, my good friend, will thy work begin?"

Then Alberich with insolence exclaimed:
"Hark! First of all with this my golden fist
I mean to clutch and fetter all the gods, —
That heavenly crew, that live and laugh and love,
Lapped in ambrosial airs and high-born peace;
I mean to wrench them from their lofty perch.
All love I have forsworn, and all that live
Shall also love forswear and curse it well;
And all that live shall be enthralled by gold,
Shall long for gold, and toil and moil for gold,
Shall feel the greed of gold, the curse of it!
Yea, from your happy heights and blessed joys,
Ye now look down upon the Nibelungs, —
But hark! beware, eternal revellers!
My might shall first enthrall your glorious men,

And make them bounden slaves to do my will,
And then your spritely women shall I thrall, —
Those who my wooing have so scoffed and
scorned, —

These shall I seize and use them as I will,
And naught of love will be in it withal!
Ha! have you heard? Beware me then, I say.
Tremble before that host, born of the night, —
The swarthy Nibelungs' all-mastering power,
When he shall bring his hoard up from the
depths,
And in the daylight show his awful might!"

And at these daring words, so fiercely spoke,
Great Wotan started and in wrath cried out,
In execration at the horrid hope:
"Avaunt, thou monster blasphemous and
mad!"

And Alberich, who scarcely understood
The wrathful words, asked Loki: "What says
he?"

Then Loki stepped between the two and spake
To Wotan: "Pray subdue thy raging wrath."
And to swart Alberich: "Yea, even so, —
Who can behold great Alberich's great work,
And not be lost in wonder and amaze?
If thy deep craft shall bring it all to pass, —
What with the treasure thou so strong dost
plan, —

Then must I hail thee mightiest of men!
Yea, moon and stars and splendid-shining sun
Shall not deny thee, but be thralls to thee!

Slaves
of the
Ring

Yet listen! it is needful before all
That in the swarming hosts of Nibelungs
Who drudge and heap the treasure for thy
 might
There should be naught of hate. Oft is it true
That wealth doth breed a host of cunning foes.
Now look thee well! Thou rulest with the ring, —
What if some villain, hating thee, should creep
Upon thee as thou sleepest, steal the ring?
What, my wise friend, would then thy fortune
 be?"

Smiling, the wily Alberich explained:
"The cunning Loki is most wise and deep,
And others he esteems as stupid beasts!
'T is true I owe him still my grateful thanks
For former service and some sage advice,
That as a stupid dog I gladly heard;
But I can show him now a trick or two.
This helmet is a magic hiding-cap;
It was my craft and skill that planned it out;
And Mime I compelled to fashion it.
Quick as a flash it wafts me where I will;
At my command transforms my size and shape,
And gives me semblance of some other form;
At will it makes me all invisible;
No man can find me,—howsoe'er he seek;
I may be everywhere, yet all unseen;
So am I safe and undisturbed by all,
And safe from thee, my fond and pious friend!"

And Loki said: "Much have I seen in life,
And some strange marvels have I chanced up-
 on;

But such great wonders as thou now dost tell
Have never been my fortune to behold.
This work thou dost relate would peerless be!
I cannot give it credence,—’tis too great!
If such a wondrous thing were possible,
Thy power would then be endless and supreme!”

Stung by the doubt, swart Alberich cried out:
“Think yet that, like yourselves, I prate and lie?”

And Loki answered: “Naught I say but this,—
Until ’tis proved, good dwarf, I doubt thy word.”

And Alberich fell in the subtle snare
And grown sarcastic uttered bitter scorn:
“Puffed up with wisdom, ninny, thou wilt burst!
Come, let me plague thee unto envy deep.
Tell me, what form or figure shall I take,
And stand before thee to fulfil my word?”

Said Loki: “Whatsoever form thou wilt,—
Only amaze me, and I stand convinced.”

So Alberich put on the magic helm,
And cried: “Ho! monster dragon, come!”

Upon the instant he had disappeared,
And in his place a monster dragon writhed,
A great green dragon,—horrid, loathsome
form;
And at the strangers yawned with foul red jaws,
That belched forth noisome vapors and hot
flames.

Pretending greatest fear, sly Loki cried:
"Oho! oho! thou dragon fiery-fierce!
Destroy me not! Spare Loki's little life!"

But Wotanspoke: "Good, Alberich, right good!
Thou art a clever and an artful imp!
How quick the dwarf is into dragon turned!"

The dragon vanished. There stood Alberich,
And spoke: "Ye wise ones, now do ye be-
lieve?"

Said Loki: "Sure my fear attested faith!
Quick into dragon was thy form new shaped,—
Since I have seen it, now will I believe;
But tell me, as thou waxest great and grand,
So also canst thou wane, and dainty be?
'Tis greater craft to shrink to tiny shape;
If one be small, from dangers he can creep;
But getting small,—that is too hard a task!"

Then Alberich: "Too hard a task for me!
Perchance for you! How small shall I become?"

And Loki asked: "And couldst thou e'en be-
come
As tiny as a toad that slinks along
And creeps within a narrow, rocky cleft?"

Cried Alberich: "Pah! nothing easier!
Spy at me now!" Again he set the helm
Upon his head and confident he spoke:
"Come, crooked toad! Come, from the cranny
creep!"

He disappeared, and in his place a toad
Crawled from a narrow cranny in the rock.

Slaves
of the
Ring

Cried Loki quick to Wotan: "There! the toad!
Seize it at once, and hold it in thy clutch!"

That moment Wotan set his heavy heel
Upon the toad and held him to the ground,
And Loki, feeling round the toad's swart head,
Found quick the magic helm in tiny size,
And snatched it with a cry of utter glee.

That instant when the helm was lost to him,
Behold a change; and it was Alberich
In his own form that writhed 'neath Wotan's
heel,
And vilely cursing in a mad despair,
And wailing: "Fool! O fool! and caught at last!"

Cried Loki: "Hold him fast till he is bound!"

Forward he brought a basting-rope and bound
The writhing Alberich both hand and foot;
They seized him, madly struggling, full of
wrath;
They dragged him with them to the gloomy
shaft.

Cried Loki: "Let us haste and get above!
He is our bondsman and our hostage there!"

And mounting upward, slow they disappeared.

THE RHINE-GOLD. PART IV

THE CURSE ETERNAL



ERE is the heavenly meadow-land
again,—

The open space upon the mountain
heights,

The meads of asphodel and amaranth,—

A region in the clouds that men ne'er know,

Where dwell the immortal gods. But every-
where

Floats o'er the fields a veil of pale gray mist,

And that great castle, once so radiant fair,—

The new Valhalla for the happy gods,—

Is hidden in the heavy murk of clouds.

Now mounting from the gloomy brimstone cleft

Came Wotan and sly Loki, and they dragged

Behind them Alberich, tight bound and grim.

Said Loki: "Pray be seated, cousin dear!

Look, my dear friend; there lies the whole vast
world

Which thou desirest eagerly to win.

What station, pray, wilt thou assign to me?"

Then Alberich in fiercest anger cried:

"Scandalous scamp! Thou scoundrel, scum of
death!

Loosen these bonds, unbind my aching limbs,

Or, villain, thou shalt rue it bitterly!"

But Wotan spake: "I have thee captive now.

My cords have bound thee faithfully and well,—

While even now thou didst presume to think

The living world already in thy power,

Here at my feet thou now dost lie in bonds!
Thou coward, dost thou not admit the facts?
Be sure before we let thee run again,
We must have mighty ransom from thy hand!"

Fuming with wrath, swart Alberich cried out:
"O what a fool I am! O empty fool!
How did I ever trust such thieving fraud?
I shall atone my fault by dire revenge!"

But Loki spake: "Ere thou dost plan revenge,
It seems important that thou shouldst be free;
No freeman to a bondsman yields respect,
Nor makes amends for outrage that he does;
So, if thou holdest vengeance in thy heart,
And wouldst regain thy needful liberty,
Pay quick the ransom that we shall demand!
Pay quick, nor hesitate a single hour!"

Hoarsely and harshly Alberich inquired:
"How much the ransom? What are your demands?"

And Wotan answered with majestic voice:
"The store of treasure,—all thy glittering gold!"

Wildly cried Alberich: "O greedy thieves!"
And feigning madness and a fuming rage,
He scowled and shrieked and cursed with foulest words;
Yet in his heart he secretly rejoiced,
For hid he held his ring and knew its craft,
And to himself he muttered: "Mine the ring!—
Lightly shall go the hoard, but not the ring!"

I can heap up anew a treasure-hoard
Whene'er I use the magic of the ring.
This is a warning that shall make me wise;
Nor is this lesson to my wits too dear
If I shall merely lose this treasure-hoard."

Asked Wotan: "Speak! Dost thou yield up the
hoard?"

And Alberich exclaimed: "Unloose my hands,
And I will call and have it brought to thee!"

So Loki quickly loosened his right hand,
And Alberich, all eager, to his lips
Lifted the ring, as signal kissing it,
Knowing its power, and muttered a command:
"Now then, 'tis done! The throngs of Nibelungs
Are swarming to obey my least command.
I hear already their black clambering hosts;
Out of the dark they climb to gleaming day.
Now loose from me these burdensome, hard
bands!"

But Wotan spake: "Nay! till the ransom's
paid!"

Now from the rocky crevices and clefts
Poured forth the swarm of climbing Nibelungs,
Laden with gleaming treasure, jewels and gold.

Cried Alberich: "O worst and sharpest shame!
My cowering slaves here see me, shackled,
shorn!"

The
Curse
Eternal

Come, you black imps! Come, put the treasure there!

Heap it together in a pile, I say!

What, must I help? Look to your work, you rogues,—

Not stop to look at me with wondering eyes!

Still am I lord! Quick, do my bidding there;

Then crawl back to the cavern in the rocks!

Off to your drudgery in deepest shafts!

Woe be to you, if I find idlers there!

A moment, and I follow on your heels!"

Rushing and pushing, dragging in the gold,
The Nibelungs piled high the treasure-hoard;
Then cowering, they slipped away in fear,
And crawled in haste down to the underworld.

Spake Alberich: "Now have I duly paid
The fullest ransom. Quick let me depart.
But e'er I go, be pleased to give to me
My helmet, which my good friend Loki holds."

But Loki threw the tarnhelm on the heap,
And said: "That booty with the ransom goes."

Scarce could swart Alberich contain his rage,
And cried: "Accursèd thief! Just wait a bit!
For he who made it once shall make again!
Mime shall still obey the power I hold.
Yet hard it is that hated foes shall seize
My best-wrought means of skilfulest defence.
Now then! Poor Alberich has given all!
Now loose these evil bands, and make me
free!"

Then Loki spoke to Wotan: "Art content?
Shall I unloose his bands, and set him free?"

The
Curse
Eternal

But Wotan answered: "Stay, methinks I see
A ring that glitters on thy finger there!
Now look thee, dwarf! that with the ransom
goes!"

In horror, Alberich cried out: "The ring!"

And Wotan firmly answered: "Yea, the ring!
Before we free thee, thou must give the ring."

Cried Alberich: "My life,—but not the ring!"

Wotan persisted: "'Tis the ring I want!
Keep thy vile life! Do with it what thou wilt!"

Cried Alberich: "Thou grantest life and limbs,
And thou must grant me this dear, precious
ring!

Far more a part of me than hand or head,
Than eyes or ears, is this dear, ruddy ring."

Indignant at such pleas and blatant lies,
Wotan's kind face grew dark, his eyes grew
stern,

As fierce he answered: "Part of thee, forsooth!
Dost thou not rave, thou shameless, lying imp?
Tell me, I pray, whence came the glittering gold
From which thy hammer fashioned this bright
ring?

Was it thine own, a part of thee, thou wretch,
When from the water's depths thou torest it?

The
Curse
Eternal

The daughters of the Rhine can tell thee quick
Whether they gave to thee the shimmering
gold!

Thou hast deceived them, lied to them, and tore
Their golden treasure from the river depths,—
Most ruthless robbed them to make this fair
ring!"

Then Alberich, amazed and startled, cried:

"A scurvy trick and scandalous deceit!

Thou flingest in my teeth the self-same crime
Which, villain, thou wert eager long to do!

Longtime ago thou hadst the Rhine-gold seized

Most gladly, but thou daredst not to give

The price to learn the art of forging it!

How happy art thou now, thou hypocrite,

That I, poor Nibelung, in torturing need

And in a maddened moment, scorned and
scoffed,

Did pay the price, and learned the awful rune
Whose magic work now smiles upon thine eyes!

What, shall my deed, unholy, desperate,

Woe-bringing, pleasure-banishing, accurst,—

Shall it bring forth a princely plaything now,

And lightly serve for brilliant ornament?

Listen, ye heavenly god, and mark me well!

Say I have sinned, the sin but falls on me;

But if thou sinnest, O eternal god,

Then strikes thy sin to every living thing,—

On them that were and are and e'er shall be!

Think twice before thou dost this deed of
shame!"

But Wotan cried: "Come, yield the ring to me!
Thy prattling proves thou hast no right to it!"

With that he rushed to fuming Alberich,
And gripped the ring by force of might and
main,
And from his finger tore it in fierce wrath.

The Curse Eternal

Whereat the swarthy dwarf screamed horribly:
“Woe, woe is me! beset, betrayed, destroyed!
Last vestige of my power forever gone!
A vassal to the vilest of my slaves!”

While Wotan on his finger slipped the ring,
And gazed upon it pleased, and joyful spake:
“Now do I hold the power that lifts me high
As mightiest of all the mighty lords!”

Thus had the love of gold assailed the gods,
And turned their hearts from heavenly law and
love,
Their symbol and their source of power su-
preme;
The lust of gold, the bale of earthly might,
Had tempted them, and they had deeply sinned,
Holding its evil power above fair love,
Breaking their solemn pledge by cunning ruse,
Lying and robbing like the lowest thief.
High law defied, the awful curse awoke,
Unrolling with relentless direful might,
The woeful blasting of the coming years;
Until at last, in hopeless destiny,
Both gods and men should crash in ruin wild.
Yet knew they naught of all this heavy doom
As Wotan wrenched the ring from Alberich.

And Loki asked: “My lord, is he released?”

The
Curse
Eternal

And Wotan answered: "Let him now be freed."

Undoing the rough bands, sly Loki spoke:
"Now slip back to thy home. Crawl freely off;
No heavy shackles bind thee. Fare thee well."

Laughing in mockery, a strange, harsh laugh
That echoed hate and scorn, the black dwarf
cried:

"Now am I free, unfettered and dismissed?
Then listen to my freedom's first salute!
As by a curse the ring first came to me,
So be this ring accurst for evermore!
As to my hands it gave unmeasured might,
So may its magic deal henceforth in death,
And whoso holds it, strike with mighty woe!
May whosoever owns it have no joy!
May evil fortune glimmer in its gleam!
Let care consume the heart that loveth it,
And envy gnaw his heart who hath it not!
Let all hearts lust after its mighty power,
And no one use it for their joy or good!
Let no new master profit by its gain,
But on him print the brand of murderer!
Let every owner know till death his doom,
And feed his fancy on the gruesome fear!
No matter whether long or short his days,
Each hour shall weary be and sad-oppressed,—
The treasure's lord, the treasure's abject slave,—
Until once more I hold it in my hand!
Thus driven to it by the direst need,
The Nibelung speaks blessing on his ring!
Receive it now, and guard it well for him,
For this my curse thou never canst escape!"

He spoke and vanished in the rocky cleft,
As desolate and poor as first he came
Tumbling and slipping o'er the Rhine's rough
rocks.

The
Curse
Eternal

Smiling, to Wotan Loki whispered low:
"And didst thou overhear his love-farewell?"

But Wotan gazed upon the ring and said:
"Begrudge him not his sputtering joy of
wrath!"

Now do the mists upon the meadows lift,
And looming great within the growing light,
Like gloomy shadows of dim towering oaks,
Came two huge, lumbering forms with awkward
strides.

Seeing them still far off, sly Loki cried:
"Fasolt and Fafner now are drawing near,
And Freya sadly follows in their steps!"

While from the other way, with eager tread
Came fairest Fricka, Donner, and bright Froh.

Froh spoke: "Behold great Wotan here again,
And wily Loki, from the underworld!"
And Donner cried: "Most welcome, brother
dear!"

While Fricka anxiously of Wotan asked:
"Art thou the bearer of good news to me?"

Then Loki pointed to the hoard and said:

The
Curse
Eternal

"With craft and cunning has the deed been
done!
There lies the ransom for our Freya dear."

And Donner spoke: "The dear one draweth
nigh;
Forth from the giants' stronghold cometh she."

Said Froh: "I know the dear one draweth nigh:
The air is sweeter, fresher as she comes!
A wondrous thrill of life goes through our
hearts!

Ah! sad would it have been for all the gods
If she had been forever lost to us,—
She who doth lend us everlasting youth
And joyous ecstasies and all delights!"

As Freya comes, the lingering mists have fled;
As Freya comes, the happy sunlight smiles;
As Freya comes, the gods renew their youth:
The pain and pallor from their faces fade,
And all the weariness of age is gone.

Thus strode the giants, leading Freya near;
And Fricka ran, embraced her, and exclaimed:
"O sister loveliest! Sweetest delight!
How glad our hearts to have thee once again!"

But Fasolt stopped her with the rough-spoke
words:
"Hold! Stand from her aside! Still is she ours!
Upon the confines of the giants' land
We took our rest to give more time to you;
She who was fairest hostage of our pact

Constant we treated in most honest way;
But sorely loath, we bring her back to you.
Give to us brothers twain the price agreed."

Great Wotan spoke: "There lies the ransom
near,—
That mighty mass of treasure and of gold.
It must be measured well to show its worth."

And Fasolt said: "Look you, it makes me sad
To lose my promised wife, fair Freya here.
We see fair Freya,—then the gold shines
pale,—
Yea, sorely loath we are to let her go.
Only one thing can cast her from my heart,—
'T is this,—for you to heap this glittering hoard,
So high and large, so beautiful and bright,
That these mine eyes shall see her form no
more!"

Said Wotan: "Fix a gauge, like Freya's form."

So Freya stood there quiet in the midst,
And on each side the giants stuck their staves,
And drove to earth until they reached her
height.

Then Freya stepped aside, and Fafner spoke:
"See! here are now our driven staves to form
A mass as large as Freya. Heap with gold!"

And Wotan spoke to all who round him stood:
"Help with the work! 'T is hateful! End it
soon!"

Cried Loki: "Help me, Froh! Cheer on the work!"

He answered: "Yea, this ends our Freya's shame."

Thus Froh and Loki heaped the treasure up
Between the staves in rude and glittering mass.

But Fafner came and closely watched their
work,

And roughly pressed the ornaments more close,
And stooped to peer about for crevices
That might be stopped with gold, and sharply
said:

"Nay, not so light and loose the glittering heap;
Fill up the gauge and make it firm and close.
See, here's a place where I can look clean
through!

Look ye, all cracks and crannies must be filled!"

Cried Loki: "Back, thou clown! Leave us alone!"

But Fafner spoke: "See here! Fill up these
chinks!"

Unhappy Wotan turned away and said:
"Deep in my breast burneth this bitter shame."

Looking toward Freya, anxious Fricka spoke:
"See how distressed she stands, the fair one
there;

Her look is silent prayer for her release.

O wicked man! 'twas thou who worked her
woe."

Still Fafner cried: "More, more! Heap up the hoard!"

The
Curse
Eternal

And Donner muttered: "Scarce can I contain
Such wrath in me this greedy wretch stirs up!
Hither, thou hound, if thou wouldst measure
more,
Then measure up thyself in fight with me!"

But Fafner sneered: "Be quiet, thunderer!
Stop rumbling! Cease! No rattling's needed
here."

Cried Donner, lifting up his hand in threat:
"Shall I not crush thee into bits, thou wretch?"

But Wotan came, and spoke in firm command:
"Nay, friends, withhold! I bid you keep the
peace.
It seems to me our Freya's fully hid."

Said Loki: "It is well. The hoard gives out."

Then Fafner measured with his eye and spoke:
"Still can I see fair Freya's shimmering hair.
Come, throw that woven work upon the heap!"

Cried Loki: "What, ye want this glittering
helm?"

Said Fafner: "Yea, haste hither with the
helm?"

Commanding, Wotan said: "Yea, let it go."

The Curse Eternal

So Loki threw the tarnhelm on the heap,
And cried: "Now have we finished up and done;
Surely you are content with all this hoard?"

Now Fasolt neared the heap and slowly spoke:
"Freya the fair shall I behold no more:
Is she released, and must I lose her now?"
Nearer he comes, and through the hoard he
peers.

"Nay! Still her glance is beaming here on me!
Her eyes like stars are flooding me with light!
Yea, through this space I see them fair and
bright.

Never, while I can see her lovely eyes,
Can I give up this goddess of my heart!"

And Fafner added: "Hark! I tell you true!
That gaping cranny must be fully stopped!"

Cried Loki: "Wretches, never satisfied!
Do you not see? Our store of gold is spent."

But Fafner answered: "Not at all, my friend!
Still gleams on Wotan's finger a gold ring.
Bring that, and fill this crevice tight and full."

Great Wotan cried: "What! give this ring to
you?"

And Loki said: "Let me advise you, fools!
That ring belongs to daughters of the Rhine,
And Wotan merely keeps to give it back."

But Wotan interrupted: "Hold thy speech!

This prize, that I so hardly, dearly won,
Fearless shall I reserve unto myself."

Said Loki: "Then my promise holds not good
That I have given to the sorrowing nymphs!"

And Wotan spake: "Thy promise binds me not.
The ring is mine,— my booty it shall be."

Then Fafner cried again: "For ransom here
It must be rendered, or our compact fails!"

But Wotan's brows grew black with hidden
rage,
And quick he fiercely answered: "Vain demand!
Here I awarded you this treasure-hoard,—
All that you should expect, and more, I gave,—
That woven tarnhelm in the glittering heap.
No more I give! Not all the mighty world
Shall from my finger wrest this golden ring!"

At these fierce words, Fasolt grew hot in wrath,
Again seized Freya from behind the hoard,
And cried: "Then all is off! The bond is void!
And Freya follows us for evermore!"

Poor Freya clasped great Wotan's knees, and
wept,
And piteous wailed: "O help me! Save me
now!"

Then his spouse Fricka of great Wotan begged:
"Hard-hearted god, give them their will and
way!"

The
Curse
Eternal

While Froh entreated: "Pray, keep not the ring!"

And Donner pleaded: "Yea, give up the ring!"

But Wotan answered all their pleas and tears:
"Leave me in peace! This ring I give not up!"
And turned away in wrath. All stood perplexed.
Fafner and Fasolt took their prisoner,
The goddess Freya wailing in despair,
And were departing. Suddenly the air
Grew heavy with a darkness drear and dread,
And there by a deep fissure in the rocks
Arose a tremulous, unearthly glow,
A misty blue, a sombre, fiery cloud.
A moment more, and from the encircling cloud
Appeared the goddess Erda, wise and good,
First mother of all life and wisdom's source.
She came from where she slumbered in the
depths,
Within the heart of the all-fruitful earth,
Her beauty wondrous, passing womankind.
Noble her presence, kindly fair her eyes;
Wise is her countenance, and calm her brow,
Shrouded in tresses dark as raven's wing.
She raised a warning hand, and slowly spoke:
"Waver, O Wotan! Quit the ring accurst!
Ruin and darkest shame hide in its wealth!
Naught but dread pain and woe its heritage!"

Cried Wotan: "Who art thou, admonisher?"

And she who bore all secrets in her soul,
And seeds of nobler life within her breast,

Something far higher than great Wotan's
self,

Now spake: "All things that ever were I know,
All things that are, and shall be, I behold,—
The primal wisdom of the unending world.
I, Erda, warn thee in thy desperate course.
Three are the daughters born to me of eld,
Long e'er the world was made. All that I see
In past and present and in future days,
These Norns, my daughters, darkly speak to
thee.

But now thine awful peril brings me here,
To speak myself to thee and warn thy heart!
O hear me! mark me! heed me, I entreat!
Be warned, else all that is shall end in shame;
Else for the Æsir dawns a dismal day;
Else dusk is coming to enwrap the gods
And end the heavenly realm in gloomy night!
Be warned, and yield the thrice-accursèd ring!"

She spoke and partly vanished from the sight,
While faded fast the glow. Then Wotan called:
"O tarry! Speak yet more unto my heart!
A secret spell hides deep within thy words!"

But she was gone with only the scant words:
"Be warned! Thou knowest much! Ponder and
pause!"

But Wotan cried: "With pain and peril near,
I must detain thee; I must know the worst!"

Impetuous he rushed to throw himself
Into the rocky cleft where Erda sank;

**The
Curse
Eternal**

But Fricka held him back, and Donner rushed,
And Froh, and flung themselves in front of him.

Cried Fricka: "Madman, folly wouldst thou
dare?"

While Froh entreated: "Wotan, pray desist!
Seek not to find her! Heed her solemn word!"

Meanwhile spake Donner to the giants twain:
"Harken, ye giants! Come back! Stay a bit!
It looks as if the ring would come your way."

Fair Freya sighed: "O, that I dared to hope!
Deem ye poor Freya such a ransom worth?"

Anxious they looked at Wotan. Deep in thought
He stood absorbed. But now decision reached,
He mustered up his strength and loudly cried:
"Return, dear Freya. I do set thee free!
We buy again immortal youth and joy!
Ye giants, take the ring!" He flung it far
Upon the glittering heap, and turned away.

And Freya now was free, and joyful ran
To the glad circle of the heavenly gods,
Who one by one embraced her with delight.

Quickly the giants hurried to the hoard,
To pack it up and carry it away.
Fafner spread out a sack of monster size,
But Fasolt swift opposed him, and cried out:
"Halt, greedy rascal; leave a scrap for me!
Right sharing gives a half to each of us."

Sneered Fafner: "I did see thee, amorous ape,
Gloat on the maiden more than on the gold!
I used my might to make thee give her up.
Thou wouldst have taken Freya for thyself,
Without a single thought or share for me;
So now that by my craft the hoard's been won,
The greater part I hold back for myself."

But Fasolt yelled: "Thou infamous old scamp!
Is this thy thieving trick to swindle me?"

Then to the gods he called: "Come, judge for us!
Should we not share the treasure half and half?"

But Wotan turned away in silent scorn.

Then Loki spoke: "Fasolt, give him the jewels,
And for thy share take thou and hold the ring."

And Fasolt took the counsel, threw himself
On Fafner, busy packing, and cried out:
"Back, thou defrauder! Give to me the ring!
'Tis mine! It shut fair Freya from my sight!"

At that he snatched the ring, but Fafner cried:
"Fists shall decide! I say the ring is mine!"

Fiercely they fought and struggled, wound their
arms
Around each other's burly forms, and strove,
Wrestling with mighty thews, and gouging
deep
With heavy, murderous fists, and now at last,—
Bloody in carnage like two ravening wolves,—

The
Curse
Eternal

Fasolt has won the ring, and holding cried:
"I hold it, and to me it shall belong!"

Now as he glutted his great greedy eyes
Upon the ring, turning his ponderous back
Against his brother, Fafner glowered in rage
And fiercely called: "Fast hold it, or it falls!"

Whereat he grasped his mighty ash-tree staff
And hurled it fierce at Fasolt with his might.
With one great blow he felled him to the earth.
He fell like some huge oak in winter woods,
Groaned one great groan like distant thunder
 roar,

Then all was still. And greedy Fafner ran,
Wrested the ring from his weak, dying clutch,
And cried with hatred fierce and keen de-
light:

"Now feast thine eyes upon fair Freya's face,
For nevermore shall thou behold this ring!"

With that, he threw the ring with careless
 scorn
Into his sack, and with it shoved the jewels,
And all the other treasure of the hoard.

The gods stood silent, but with horror deep
Their hearts were heavy; and a sickening fear
Crept over them, as of a nearing storm
And fatal tempest, and great Wotan spoke:
"Behold the dread power of the fatal curse!"

Then Loki spoke,—inveterate talker he:
"Was ever fortune, Wotan, like thine own?"

'Twas much when thou at first didst win the
ring;
Much more it is in losing of the ring.
Behold thy foes are giving thee revenge
Over the gold of which thou art well rid."

But Wotan answered, shuddering and sad:
"Strange horror seems to overhang my life,
And all my soul is fettered fast in fear;
Erda alone can teach me of the end.
Her must I seek, her must I find forthwith."
Perhaps great Wotan saw a vision then,—
The gods were failing; in them lay no help;
The giants and the dwarfs were rude and
mean,—

Surely a greater race must shortly come
To bring a reign of justice, truth, and right,—
A race more stalwart than the heavenly gods,
A race of heroes, strong, invincible.
He felt that Erda, source of primal life,
First mother, fruitful of all noble things,
Must travail once again and heroes breed.
But Fricka came cajolingly and said:
"Why dost thou, Wotan, linger sadly here?
Behold thy noble castle shines most fair;
Surely its high and hospitable halls
Are eager for good comrades' fellowship?"

Sadly spoke Wotan: "Ah, a shameful price
I pay for these, my lofty castle halls!"

Said Donner, pointing to the trailing mists:
"See how the fog is floating on the heights!
This mournful drapery doth make me sad.

The
Curse
Eternal

These thin clouds I will gather in a heap
And charge them with my thunder and my fire
To clear the air for us, and brighten heaven."

With that he boldly strode across the fields,
Mounting a rock that overhung the gorge.
Below yawned the abyss and river flood,
Beyond, the mists and cloud-lands piled up
high;
He swung his hammer as he loudly called,—
Called as a shepherd calls his wandering flock:

"H O! ho! high and low
Fall from the blue,
Gentlest of dew!
Float, airy mist,
Rainbow-kissed!
Donner is here,
Calling his host!

"Hammer swift swings!
Lift, stormy wings!
Lightnings, flash!
Thunders, crash!
Donner is here,
Calling his host!
Ho! ho! high and low!"

Obedient to his call, the trailing mists
Gathered around him, pressing thick and fast;
He called and shouted, and the sky grew black,—
He called close shrouded in the gathering
clouds;
And through the dusk the gleaming lightning
flashed,

And as his mighty hammer struck the rocks
Out leaped a galaxy of blinding stars,
And heavy thunder answered to the stroke,—
The echoes bounded on from peak to peak,
From cloud to cloud along the mountain's crest;
Then rumbled down the valleys, with the roar
Of dim reverberations to the sea.

He called to Froh: "Come, brother, come with
me!

Help me to build the radiant rainbow bridge!"

And Froh quick vanished in the thunder-clouds.

Then suddenly there came a mighty rift,—
The clouds had broken, drifted far away.
Donner and Froh were standing in the light;
And wondrous sight! a radiant rainbow bridge
Arose in glory from the flowery fields
Over the valley where deep flows the Rhine,
Straight to the castle on the glorious height,
Shining resplendent in the sunset's rays.
Then unto Wotan and the heavenly gods
Gayly Froh spoke: "This bridge will bring you
home;
'Tis lightly built, yet for your footsteps firm;
So tread undaunted on this fearless path."

While Wotan, standing quiet and absorbed
In contemplation of the castle, spake:
"See how at evening time the sunlight's gleam
Gilds with its glory all the castle's towers.
This morning in the glamouring of dawn,
Mighty and shimmering, it knew no lord,

The
Curse
Eternal

Although it dimly seemed to beckon me.
Scarce did I dream that I would gain the heights
And be the master of Valhalla's might.
From morn till eve, through anxious cares and
strife,
No nearer to its wonders found my way;
Now as the night draws nigh comes hope of
peace.
It calls us to a refuge from all woe:
So do I give thee greetings, castle mine,—
Peace in thy halls from every grief and fear."

Then to fair Fricka lovingly he spoke,
The while he took her gently by the hand:
"Come with me, dearest spouse, and to the
heights!
Henceforth Valhalla is our dwelling-place."

And wondrous gleamed Valhalla on the
heights,—
Her walls shone bright as rows of glittering
spears;
The roof resplendent like great golden shields;
Hundreds of open gates and welcoming doors
For myriad warriors from the fields of earth,—
The chosen heroes of the future years,
To be great Wotan's mighty body-guard
Against the awful prophecies of doom.
Then asked his spouse: "What may Valhalla
mean?
This name meseems I ne'er have heard before."

Smiling, he answered: "What my mind may
find

Mighty against all fear and hopeless doubt,
If it shall prove success, and solve our doubts,
And banish fear, then thou shalt understand."

So Wotan and fair Fricka bent their way
To where the rainbow bridge begins its course;
Froh and fair Freya followed joyfully;
And Donner full of cheer came plodding on.

But Loki paused, looked after them, and said:
"E'en now the gods are hasting to their
doom,—

These gods who think themselves in strong
estate.

They dream not that their ancient power hath
fled.

Almost ashamed am I to share their deeds:
I feel a deep desire within my soul
Again to wander clad in flickering fire,
To burn and waste the folks who curbed me
once,—

Rather than walk this fatal primrose path,
And be at last engulfed with these so blind,
Although they be most godlike of the gods.
Methinks there is some reason in this thing,—
I'll brood on it. Who knows what I may do?"

He followed on, nor told the gods his doubts.

Meanwhile rude Fafner by his brother's corpse
Had gathered greedy all his treasure-hoard;
Cowered in the dust when rolled the thunder
storm;
Gazed with amaze at the fair rainbow bridge;

The
Curse
Eternal

Then flung his heavy sack upon his back,
And with an ugly look and leer was gone,—
Fafner the greedy, Fafner, heartless brute,
Greatest and grimmest of the giant race,—
Gone to heap up his treasure in a cave;
Become a dreadful dragon by the power
In the strange tarnhelm with its magic craft;
And sit a slave in weary vigil there,
Guarding his gold, useless to all the world.

Now from the valley came the Rhine-nymphs'
song:

“**R**HINE-GOLD! Rhine-gold!
Rarest of gold!
How wondrous and bright
Was the smile of thy light!
Our glory of yore,—
For thee we implore!
Give back to our fold
Our Rhine-gold, rarest of gold!”

Wotan had set his foot upon the bridge,
Eager to tread the glorious arch of heaven,
But at the song he stayed his way, and asked:
“What mournful wailings these that come to
me?”

And Loki said: “The daughters of the Rhine
Are wailing, sore bereaved of their Rhine-gold.”

Then Wotan, startled, spoke in angry mood:
“Accursèd nixies! Quell their clamorous noise!
Why do they plague us with eternal moans?”

So Loki called in brutal irony,—
Happy to be a mocking, spiteful voice:
“Ye, in the waters, are ye wailing yet?
Hark what the mighty Wotan now doth will!
No more upon you maidens gleams the gold!
Henceforth with heavenly brilliance be content,
And with the golden glory of the gods!”
The gods had listened, and they laughed
aloud,—
Their laughter echoing in the tossing flood;
And turned once more to cross the rainbow
bridge
To bright Valhalla, shining glorious.

But from below came still the wailing song:

“**R**HINE-GOLD! Rhine-gold!
Rarest of gold!
Would that thy light
Might awaken our night!
Woe, woe for truth!
Now is our ruth!
In the dark deeps
Truth ever keeps!
What blazes on high
Oft is a lie!
Rhine-gold! Rhine-gold!
Rarest of gold!”

THE END

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